

Storm Centre

A NOVEL

BY

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PART I

I

ONLY an Englishman could have created Fort Mallet, an Englishman eaten up by nostalgia of exile. People of other nationalities, seeing it for the first time, tactfully hid their smiles and then wrote home about its incongruities. The settlement was built upon what was technically an island, which is to say that it was a piece of land, some fifty acres in extent, surrounded by water. Two bridges connected it with the mainland, one leading to the native town—the Port, as it was called—a half-mile distant, and the other in a westerly direction to where a rough track led along the coast past the coconut plantations, until it petered out in swamp and jungle.

Fort Mallet itself was built around what was in effect an English village green. Not even the hot sun of the Malay Archipelago, nor the alternating palms and flamboyant trees which lined The Green, nor even the neatly clipped hibiscus hedges which shielded the bungalows from the vulgar gaze, could destroy the illusion entirely. At the seaward end of the Fort stood the Residency, which, as beffited the seat of authority, was built on a slight eminence, its gables culminating in a cliff some eighty feet in height. On either side of The Green were the houses of the European mixed bag of officials and merchants. At the lower end stood the hospital, while beside it was a barracks-like structure known as the mess.

At five yard intervals were neat noticeboards which proclaimed in English and Malay that it was forbidden to cross The Green itself, except by the pathways provided for that purpose, unless barefoot, or wearing flat-heeled shoes. An arm of The Green, directly hidden by an avenue of

casuarinas, and dominated by the Fort Mallet Club, was set apart for cricket, tennis, croquet and bowls, to say nothing of an indifferent nine-hole golf course. Around the entire green, set between white-painted wooden railings, was a riding-track where, in the early mornings and evenings, everyone possessing a horse or pony—which is to say, more or less everyone except Mr and Mrs Gosling of the Protestant Mission and Father Courtenay of the Jesuit Mission—rode doggedly in order to stir torpid livers into action.

The charm of Fort Mallet lay in its spaciousness. All its buildings sprawled on one floor. Each dwelling was set in a comfortable garden, separated from its neighbours by high and deep hibiscus hedges which ensured complete privacy. People who did not like privacy, nor relish the quiet, contemplative life, did not remain there long, for it was no place for the gregarious and the ambitious. The stage provided by Fort Mallet for its actors was too small. Twice in recent years the Colonial Office had sought to thrust promotion upon Hugh Kennedy, the Resident. He had only to lift his finger to become Sir Hugh Kennedy, K.C.M.G., and His Excellency the Governor, of one of the lesser Crown Colonies. The decision on each occasion had been left to his wife, who had rejected the idea vigorously. "No, old man," she had said after brief thought, "I'm not the type. I'd rather be Maggie here among friends than the Governor's lady somewhere else. Where, do you suppose, we'd git a garden like ours here? Besides, as an Excellency I couldn't potter about in my own way. There'd be hordes of gardeners who would probably take their orders from the Public Works Department, and I should have to spend my time 'ing bazaars. Besides, Hugh, you'd look quite ridiculous in a uniform now."

For the thousandth time in twenty years Hugh Kennedy thanked God, that, at a time when thrown in contact with scores of richer, better connected, more beautiful young women, his choice had fallen upon Maggie. For her sake he would have been prepared to endure promotion. Indeed, for her sake he would have been prepared to endure

almost anything, but his whole soul rebelled at being uprooted from the peaceful, pleasant life they had made for themselves. He did not care for the rattling, screeching race of the twentieth century, which before long would be in its second quarter.

Afternoon tea at the Residency was served in fine weather upon a shady knoll which commanded a view of the entire Green. The Chinese servant who brought the tea-tray always brought with him Maggie's binoculars, which accounted for her encyclopædic knowledge of everything which happened in the Fort. So detailed was this at times that she was credited by some with psychic powers. Upon the approach of visitors the binoculars were always hastily hidden in a sewing bag. The Resident deplored this habit on the part of his wife. "I wish, Maggie," he remarked one golden afternoon, "that you wouldn't do that. It's—it's—well it isn't honourable. You wouldn't open other people's letters or listen at keyholes, would you? Well, surely, peering at them through glasses is much the same thing? I don't like it and I wish . . ."

"Fiddlesticks! It's just as honourable as getting confidential reports on the junior officials. You see people when they're on their best behaviour, while I see them when they're being natural. Anyway, be quiet for a moment. There's a stretcher being carried out of the Mess and I want to see who it is. It looks to me like young Maynard. I'll have to go down to see him."

"I hope it isn't he," observed the Resident. "He's due to go on a patrol next week and there isn't anyone to replace him."

"How can you be so inhuman, Hugh? You know perfectly well that his sister is coming to stay with him. The boat should be here tonight, or tomorrow at latest. At least give the poor girl time to settle into their new house before you send him off into the jungle."

"Government has got to go on, Maggie!" observed the Resident testily. "Affairs cannot be arranged for the private convenience of officials. You should know that—by now."

"I'm going down to see what's wrong."

Maggie Kennedy gulped a cup of tea and, seizing the glasses again, turned them in the direction of the Fort Mallet Club where, on the shady verandah, sprawled in a long chair, lay the Principal Medical Officer, Dr Angus McCloskey, recognisable by his shock of red hair and the fact that nobody else would dare to use his chair, which was placed on an angle where it caught every breeze.

The Resident sat, thoughtfully sipping his tea, while under cover of a giant beige sunshade, his wife, disregarding the injunctions on the noticeboard prominently displayed outside the Residency gate, made off across The Green wearing high-heeled shoes. Only Maggie, he reflected, would dare to awaken the doctor until he had completely slept off the effect of his noon libations.

"Hey, wake up, Mac," said Maggie when she reached the Club, shaking the recumbent doctor by the shoulder. "Wake up. I've got a patient for you."

"Go to hell!"

"If you think I'm going to allow a drunken, red-headed sawbones to talk to me like that, you're very much mistaken," observed Maggie, with set lips and the light of battle in her eyes. "I'll give you until I count ten. . . . One, two, three. . . ."

"Go to hell!"

A newspaper lay across the doctor's knees. To the corner of it Maggie applied a lighted match and, in order to keep the conflagration within bounds, prudently held a syphon of soda water poised as an extinguisher.

Not a man of equable temper at the best of times, the P.M.O. leapt from the chair uttering the most appalling imprecations. Even Maggie, used to his outbursts, blanched for a moment. "That isn't the kind of language to use before a lady, Mac," she said warningly, holding the syphon poised for action.

"A mad female that tries to incinerate a sleeping man can't complain of anything she hears," was the not unreasonable reply. "What do you want?"

"I want ~~you~~, Mac. You're supposed to be a doctor," aren't you? One of the youngsters has been carried out of the Mess into the hospital. What's wrong with him?"

"I'm not a clairvoyant," growled McCloskey. "How in the hell should I know? Which one of them, anyway?"

"I'm almost sure it's young Maynard. Anyway, let's go and find out. That, in case you don't know, is what you're here for. What's more, as a doctor you should know better than to drink yourself into a stupor at noon. A fine example. . . ."

They walked out of the Club into the afternoon sun in silence.

"Which way are you taking, Maggie?" asked the doctor.

"I'm going eastabout," was the reply.

"Then this is where we part company," observed McCloskey, "for I have a mind to take the westabout route. 'Twill be more peaceful like that. Furthermore, until I've made my rounds, you'll oblige me by remaining outside the hospital, Maggie. I want no interference."

"There are times, Mac, when you forget that Hugh is the Resident and I'm his wife."

"I forget nothing," he snapped, brushing pieces of charred paper off his white suit. "Neither you nor your husband has any authority inside the hospital and don't forget it, or I'll t'row you out with my own hands."

Having a fair idea that he would do just that, Maggie Kennedy re-entered the Club and relaxed into a long chair from which she watched the doctor until he was out of sight beyond the casuarinas. Then, not quite knowing why, she heaved a deep sigh. In part it was the contented sigh of victory, but it was more than that. Maggie Kennedy recognised that Fate in general had been kind to her, but it had denied her the great blessing of children. So her sigh was that of the childless woman whom life had metamorphosed into the universal mother. The young men who lived a bachelor life at the Mess were her especial care. Now that she was a middle-aged woman, they were the children she had never had. Even the ferocious, red-haired Dr McCloskey

came under the spreading umbrella of her affection, and there were times when she worried for him as well as for the others.

When she had first come East as a bride, Maggie had been quite passable looking, though never a beauty. Now, only her eyes remained young. They were cool and steady grey eyes, which surveyed the world from either side of a nose which was too large, accentuating the depth of the eye sockets. She had a big generous mouth, too. The adjective gaunt might well have been applied to her, for she was big-boned: the kind of Englishwoman whom foreigners find it so easy to caricature maliciously.

Night had fallen and other people were coming into the Club before Maggie strode over to the hospital.

II

JACK MAYNARD, despite his twenty-seven years, looked like a small boy as he lay on the pillows, his face flushed with fever, mumbling in delirium. He was down to skin and bone, worn out after long weeks of patrol in the jungle, drinking polluted water, eating canned food and covering as many as twenty miles daily on foot. The wonder was that in the fever-stricken hinterland he had not collapsed sooner.

Maggie Kennedy looked at the chart hanging at the foot of the bed. At five o'clock the temperature had been 103·9, at six it had risen five points and now—at nine o'clock—it ~~was~~ 104·8 and, according to the Chinese orderly, still rising. The margin between life and death, as Maggie knew only too well, was becoming perilously narrow. Men did survive fantastic temperatures, but somehow they were never quite the same again. It was all so tragic. Here lay just one more young life, in danger of being blown out like a candle, because of too much hardship and exposure, not

enough care—and for what? In a remote village in the foot-hills beyond the swamplands a jealous husband had knifed his wife's admirer—not even her lover—and had taken to the hills, knowing that justice, cold and impersonal, would overtake him with the inevitability of the night which follows day. If Jack Maynard were to die, he would be just another victim of the jealous husband's rage, as surely as though he had been struck down by the identical knife.

"There isn't anything you can do, Maggie," came the voice of Dr McCloskey, gentle now, with all the soothing qualities of a lullaby. "He'll begin to sweat within the hour and then—take my word for it—his temperature will drop as quickly as it's risen. He's the tough, wiry kind that survives—almost anything."

"I'll wait until the poor boy begins to sweat, Mac. Then I'll be able to sleep. It's such a damned shame, Mac. The service asks too much of these boys. It—it sucks the life from them."

Dr McCloskey nodded glumly, leading his companion away from the sickbed. "I'll buy you a drink, Maggie. We can come back later."

At the Fort Mallet Club they found the Resident, sitting a little apart, watching a game of billiards. He was a naturally gregarious man, but he knew from long experience that authority, if it is to be effective, must be clothed in the mantle of mystery. He wanted to unbend, to come off the perch on which circumstances had placed him, because it was at times a lonely perch. As Resident, he ruled a land as big as England. The territory under his control was ruled by example, which always comes from the top. If he relaxed, his immediate subordinates would relax, and the risk was one he was not prepared to take. So he sat, his corpulent torso encased tightly in a white drill jacket buttoned at the neck, wishing that he could let himself go like these others around him.

In one corner of the Club was the usual Saturday night game of poker. The stakes were big enough to be interesting, but not so big that anyone could be hurt. It was nice

friendly poker, conversational poker, in which it was considered legitimate to talk a man out of a pot. A cool breeze wafted the good-natured banter across the room from time to time, causing Hugh Kennedy to wish that his conception of duty would allow him to take a hand. There were two tables of bridge, but bridge bored him. A smile of pure pleasure crossed his face when his wife, followed by McCloskey, crossed the Club lounge to join him. He listened without comment to the doctor's news regarding Maynard. At Fort Mallet, fever scarcely ranked as news. Everybody suffered recurrent bouts of malaria, which ranked, like housemaid's knee, or miner's pthysis, as an occupational malady. Massive doses of quinine, a few days of rest and fever was forgotten until the next bout.

"Pity young Maynard couldn't have waited a few days until his sister has time to get settled," observed the Resident.

"If he had waited," retorted Maggie sharply, "you'd have sent him away on patrol. Of course," she continued, "we shall have to put her up until Jack is on his feet."

"Of course," said the Resident mildly in a tone of resignation. He was about to say more when, from the direction of the bar, came the sound of raised voices. An ugly word split the silence which, briefly, fell upon the Club.

The Resident frowned. It was one of the many perplexities of his position that he never quite knew which were official and which unofficial occasions. In the Club, he liked to believe, his status was that of an ordinary member, but in this instance the offender was one of his own juniors, a youngster named Brockman. Overcoming his dislike of exercising authority on a social occasion, he walked over to the bar, there to stand between Brockman and a tall, well-made man of about thirty with a shock of unruly fair hair. The latter, John Hudd, was one of the mercantile community.

"This is a club, Brockman," said the Resident coldly, "not a pot-house. There are ladies present, including my wife. I'm talking to you now as a fellow member, who objects strongly to filthy language. Go to your quarters now

and tomorrow morning, when you're sober, I'll have a further chat with you."

Thoroughly subdued, Brockman made his exit with as much dignity as he could muster.

"Forgive me interfering, sir," observed Hudd, "but I'm afraid it was to a great extent my fault. I was pulling his leg rather unmercifully and—well, I should have known he doesn't like it. He's an awfully good chap really, but he had just one more than he can carry. That's all."

"Nice of you to take it like that," said the Resident. "Fellow deserves a punch on the nose for using such an expression. I sometimes think it's a pity duelling went out, because good manners went out at the same time. In the duelling days a man thought twice before he called another man filthy names, or slandered a woman. It was too dangerous. In a place like this good manners are especially important. We're too small a community for brawling. We've got to stick together and like each other, or life would quickly become intolerable. By the way, Hudd, my wife wants you to come to dinner. I forget when, so join us in a drink now and she'll tell us."

Of all the young men in Fort Mallet, John Hudd was Maggie's favourite. He was the son she had dreamed of, but never had. He was not far short of being ugly, but his grave face, when illuminated by a smile of great charm, was pleasing. He possessed the rare combination of a warm friendliness and manners which were just old-fashioned enough to be attractive to a middle-aged woman. None of these qualities were of a kind calculated to bring commercial success to their possessor and yet he had prospered in a small way. He inspired confidence.

No sooner had John Hudd taken his seat beside Maggie Kennedy than from the direction of the sea came three long blasts of a ship's siren. A few seconds later a gust of cool—almost cold—air swept through the Club. The dead palm fronds rattled outside. People shivered and, with the same abruptness as it had come, the breeze dropped. "I wish that hadn't happened," said Maggie. "There was something

ominous about it. I shan't rest now until I learn that the mail hasn't brought us bad news."

"Your liver's out of order, Maggie," said McCloskey. "Take a dose of calomel."

"Yes, probably you're right, Mac. Order us all a drink, Hugh, and by the time we've finished, we shall be able to go aboard."

"Surely, my dear," urged the Resident, "we can leave it until morning? She can't sail until noon tomorrow at the earliest. She has at least four hundred tons of cargo waiting for her."

"You do as you like, Hugh, but I'm going aboard now. I shan't sleep until I've read the mail. Besides, there's young Maynard's sister to be thought of. Someone has to look after her. I'll call in at the hospital on the way."

III

THE arrival of the fortnightly mail boat from Singapore was an event of the first magnitude for the little community of Fort Mallet. By long-standing custom the mailbags were brought direct to the Club, there to be sorted by a clerk from the Resident's office. With his other duties, Hugh Kennedy combined that of postmaster, collector of customs, and most of the other offices which modern government deemed necessary. When the mail for those who lived in the Fort—the Europeans—had been separated from that for the Port and the interior, it was set out in a number of neat piles to be claimed by the owners who, waiting eagerly, pounced like hawks and disappeared to their own quarters. During the few hours the mail boat remained in the harbour they would write replies to urgent letters which, otherwise, would have to wait another fortnight.

Mail day changed the face of life at Fort Mallet. The handful of white people ceased briefly to be a community which

looked inward, becoming instead a group of detached individuals whose interests were focused upon friends and relations on the other side of the world. An unwritten law decreed that the opening of letters be done privately as being less hurtful to those who received no mail.

On this particular evening it was nearly eleven o'clock before the mailbags arrived at the Club. It was an unusually heavy mail, so people composed themselves in patience for a long wait. The Chinese bar boy sighed as he looked at the clock. It would be two o'clock in the morning, at the earliest, before he could go to bed.

The Residency clerk, waiting to open the mail, tapped the table impatiently. Not until the Resident arrived dare he break the seals on the mailbags.

Footsteps were heard ascending the wooden steps outside the Club. There was an audible sigh of disappointment as the lanky, red-haired figure of Angus McCloskey entered the lounge and made straight for the bar, where a dozen or more of the younger men were gathered.

“How’s Maynard?” asked several voices.

“Sweating like a pig and sleeping like a child. He’ll be all right in the morning,” replied the doctor, surveying the group with quizzical eyes, his gaze passing from one to the other.

“What’s on your mind, Mac?” asked one of the men. “Anything wrong with us?”

“Not yet, my lad, but there soon will be. One or more of you is about to catch a serious disease and I’m wondering which of you it will be. It’s one of those rare diseases that’s both catching and hereditary. It’s in all your families, God help you. The Latin name is *uxoritis*. You’ll probably all catch it, you poor bastards, but it’ll only be fatal in one case. The sad thing is that there’s nothing to be done about it, and now isn’t someone going to buy me a drink?”

Someone slid a whiskey-and-soda across the bar to him and, pressed for an explanation of his cryptic remarks, he turned laughing to the bewildered faces around him. “I’ve an advantage over you,” he began. “I’ve seen and talked

to Jack Maynard's sister. She'll play havoc with your sleep, my lads and you'll not rest until at least one of you has made a damned fool of himself."

"What's she like, Mac?" asked a chorus of voices.

"She's far too lovely to be turned loose among a pack like you that haven't seen a pretty face or figure for a few years," Mac replied sombrely. "The consequences are incalculable, so I won't attempt the impossible."

As McCloskey spoke all heads were turned towards the lounge.

A minute later he was alone at the bar, sipping his drink and playing idly with a set of poker dice. The others were in the main lounge clustering around Maggie Kennedy and a tall, slim brunette, clad in an immaculately pleated linen skirt and a kind of sailor blouse. Maggie Kennedy was performing a wholesale introduction. "This is Miss Maynard, Jack's sister, and for heaven's sake don't cluster round like flies round a honeypot." Rattling off a list of the other names, she plumped herself down into a chair, signalling expertly to a boy for a drink.

Diana Maynard, covered with pretty confusion, made her excuses and went in the direction of the bar. "I simply must talk to Dr McCloskey," she explained. "About poor Jack," she added lamely.

At Diana's approach the doctor—with seemingly bad grace—climbed off his stool to face her. "If you're not busy, Dr McCloskey," she began haltingly, "I'd like to talk to you—about Jack."

"Then," he said, seizing his drink, "if it's all the same to you, Miss Maynard, we'll sit at one of the vacant tables. This," he added, pointing to a painted white line on the floor, "divides the sheep from the goats. The bar and any part of the lounge west of the white line are forbidden territory for ladies. But, of course," he added with a smile lacking any warmth, "you could not be expected to know that. And now, what can I add to what I told you yonder at the hospital?"

Diana's dark blue eyes looked searchingly at a pair of

green eyes beneath shaggy red eyebrows, wondering at the smouldering resentment she read there. "He's my brother, Dr McCloskey," she said gently, "and I'm very worried. I hardly recognised him."

The resentment in McCloskey's eyes died. He became professional and impersonal. "Malaria is one of the hazards of life here, you must understand, Miss Maynard. We all get it. You'll get it before long."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," snapped Diana. "Malaria is carried by mosquitoes, isn't it? I know how to look after myself...."

The doctor nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I would judge that you do, Miss Maynard, so maybe I'm wrong. We doctors don't claim to be infallible, you know. But, speaking of your brother, his case is complicated by being in a very run-down condition. He doesn't spare himself. He'll have to take it easy for a bit and you'll have to feed him up. A spell in a cold country wouldn't hurt him. When is his next leave due?"

"In a little over a year, doctor. We plan then to go to New Zealand together. Mother has gone to live there with her sister."

"A year, eh? Ah, well, a lot can happen in a year. Three hundred and sixty-five dawns and three hundred and sixty-five sunsets. The dawn here is lovely, Miss Maynard. When the sun strikes the night mist, for a few moments the world becomes opalescent. Everything is cool and innocent, as it must have been at the hour of creation. It is a day lost when you don't see the dawn. The worst of us are filled with good intentions, which are forgotten, of course, by sunset. That's the dangerous hour, Miss Maynard. The sunsets are wicked with great splashes of colour, dark wine reds mingled with paddy green and flecked with gold and purple and other colours without a name...."

Diana looked sharply at McCloskey, realising with a shock that he was hardly talking to her. He was far away.

"You sound like a poet, doctor. I'll remember about the

sunsets and be very careful. I suppose the mosquitoes are bad then."

"Don't worry about your brother," said McCloskey abruptly. "He'll be all right—in spite of me. And now, if you will excuse me, I must go and give Jimmie his supper. I have a fine ripe durian for him. I'll introduce you to Jimmie one day. I shall be interested to know what he thinks of you. A great judge of character is Jimmie. Good night!"

Bowing with exaggerated courtesy to Maggie Kennedy, the doctor strode out into the night.

"There's some mail for you, Mac," someone called, but he seemed not to hear.

Dr McCloskey received very little mail, other than official correspondence and medical journals. From time to time, but less frequently as the years passed, letters came to him postmarked in England, France, Italy and Egypt, all addressed by a sprawling hand in mauve ink. These, his servants observed, lay sometimes for weeks unopened on his desk. Then they would disappear into a locked drawer. On these occasions, it was duly noted, the doctor became taciturn and unsociable, drinking more heavily than usual.

The sight of the familiar handwriting and mauve ink brought back memories of the only woman who had ever meant anything in McCloskey's life. Foolishly, he had put her on a pedestal, and he had never quite recovered from the shock of learning from her lips that she was not prepared to wait any longer for the things which were out of the reach of a struggling young doctor's pocket. She had married the other man, nearly twice her own age, learning too late that it was a tragic mistake. Three years after her marriage she became a rich young widow, but by then Angus McCloskey had chosen his own road and was not willing to retrace his footsteps. A deep and abiding love had turned, if not to hatred, to an icy contempt. Worse still, a brilliant brain had been lost to medical science, deteriorating under the corrosive acid of self-pity.

As the Kennedys and Diana Maynard strolled back to

the Residency long after midnight, the latter remarked : "What an odd man Dr McCloskey is!"

"He's a first-rate doctor. Your brother couldn't be in better hands," said the Resident.

"We're all rather odd, my dear," said Maggie. "It's an odd sort of place, too, but the way to be happy here is not to notice oddity."

"What is a durian, Mrs Kennedy?"

"A durian is, perhaps, our one local delicacy. It's a fruit. Look at the tree over your head now. That's a durian tree."

Diana looked up to where, illuminated by the Residency lights, great gourd-like fruits hung in profusion.

"You don't want to let one fall on your head, either," said the Resident. "The durian, my dear, is a cultivated taste. Make up your mind to taste one before you smell it and you'll say it's the most delicious thing you ever ate. Some say it smells like bad eggs. Others say it's more like bad drains, with an overtone of dead water-buffalo. . . ."

"Don't be disgusting, Hugh!"

"What a very curious thing to have for supper!" remarked Diana in a puzzled fashion.

"What on earth are you talking about," asked Maggie.

"Well, Dr McCloskey said that a friend of his called Jimmie was going to eat one for his supper. . . ."

Kennedy's guffaws of laughter startled a cloud of bats from a tree. "Jimmie is Mac's pet *orang-utan*. Mac thinks the world of him. In due course you will be presented to Jimmie. Newcomers here call first at the Residency and then on Jimmie, although lately, I've noticed, the procedure has been reversed. Your social position here depends to a large extent on how Jimmie receives you. Mac insists that he is a better judge of character than any human being and threatens to teach him medical diagnosis."

"It all sounds rather odd, but . . ."

"As I told you, my dear," said Maggie with a chuckle, "we are rather odd."

"When you come to think of it," continued Diana slowly, "even an *orang-utan* couldn't be a much worse judge of

character than most of us seem to be. But it really is original to let character have anything to do with social standing. I thought it was bank balance and pedigree which counted."

"I observe that we have a cynic come amongst us," chuckled the Resident. "Perhaps a little healthy cynicism will be good for us. There have been times lately when I have noticed a general tendency to become saccharinated. You know what I mean. In our efforts to be mutually charitable, we sometimes carry forbearance to the point of condonation."

When Diana had been shown to her room, Maggie found her husband mixing a final whiskey-and-soda. "You wouldn't have thought," the latter remarked "that young Maynard could have a sister like that. Or, would you?" he added when Maggie remained silent.

"I don't know what I think, Hugh, except that she's very lovely and that . . ."

"And that what, my dear?"

"And that it's time we went to bed," concluded Maggie, glancing at the clock.

IV

ON ordinary days John Hudd took a sensuous pleasure from the ethereal dawn hour, but on this particular day, whose dawn was no less lovely than the rest, he spoke irritably to the servant who brought him a slice of fresh Sarawak pineapple, cool with the dew, and the customary pot of tea. As he consumed this simple breakfast on the verandah which overlooked The Green, bathed in a light mist which the sun was turning to mother-of-pearl, he scowled angrily. Two ponies galloped past the Mess, but he pretended not to see them, nor to hear a gay challenge, uttered in a melodious contralto voice. He watched as the two horsemen parted at the gates of the Residency and Adrian Hornby, now alone,

cantered past the Mess and across the bridge to the mainland. The day was already poisoned for John Hudd. Even the glory of the flamboyant trees, now at the peak of their perfection, held no beauty for him.

Shaved and dressed in a white duck suit, John Hudd paused in the big lounge of the Mess, surveying its untidiness and disarray with disgust. Servants were at work sweeping up cigarette ash, clearing away empty glasses, which still smelled of the last evening's whiskey. There was a broken glass on the floor and, beside the gramophone, a broken record. On tables, the arms of long chairs, the floor and everywhere were torn envelopes, old newspapers, dog-eared books and magazines. "What a pigsty!" said John Hudd disgustedly, turning on his heel and walking out into the early morning sun. There had been several hundred other mornings when the lounge had looked much the same, but these had passed without remark.

Fort Mallet was exclusively residential. No commerce of any kind was permitted to sully its English village-green perfection. Business was banished to the Port, as distinct from the Fort. The Port lay some eight hundred yards distant, on a semi-circular bay which provided a deep-water anchorage for the infrequent vessels which called. Here were established the trading houses, the European and native shops, the godowns and the rest of the commercial activities which justified the settlement's existence. It was in this direction that John Hudd, casting a sour look towards the Residency, turned reluctant footsteps. He walked briskly, once clear of the Fort, and did not pause until he arrived in front of a ramshackle wood and corrugated-iron structure, which bore on a facia-board the legend :

JOHN HUDD

Rubber, Copra, Coconuts, Timber, Tobacco,
Hemp, Cutch and Sago, etc.

IMPORTER, EXPORTER and GENERAL
COMMISSION AGENT

Two weeks previously this would have been a most accurate and complete picture of John Hudd, the picture of a man who lived for the business he had created from nothing and who was content to forgo the fleshpots until such time as he reaped the rewards of his industry. Above all, it would have been the word-picture of a contented man.

Sitting at his desk, John Hudd concentrated upon a pile of bills of lading, checked a bank statement with his own records and then, with a gesture of distaste, walked out into his godown where, for the first time, its odours failed to thrill him. The piled sacks of copra, the bales of crêpe rubber, even the aromatic timbers from the interior—these the very life-blood of his business—became no more than bad smells. He looked at his watch. It was nine o'clock. In less than half an hour he was in danger of committing a great folly and—knowing this—doubted his ability to do otherwise.

With his gratuity from the 1914-18 war, paid to him less than three years previously, plus his savings and £5,000 borrowed from an uncle, John Hudd had created a small but prosperous business which was the pride of his heart. He had worked hard, at all times putting business before pleasure or personal convenience. Plantation owners, finding him straight in his dealings and energetic in their interests, were beginning to entrust their affairs to him, glad to escape from the clutches of the monopolistic firm of Hardinge & Boulton, whose policy over the years had been to swallow the little men it represented. The first plantation owner to put his affairs in the hands of John Hudd had been Adrian Hornby, who had inherited from his father a valuable coconut property situated some four miles down the coast from the Port. Out of this association had sprung a warm friendship and it was Adrian Hornby who, in less than thirty minutes, was due to discuss mutually important matters. It had been Adrian Hornby who, only the previous evening, under plea of going home early, had left the Club to keep a moonlight rendezvous with Diana Maynard and

who, not content with this, had cantered around The Green with her at dawn.

Common sense told John Hudd that his business relationship with Hornby was a thing entirely apart, but the voice of common sense was barely audible to a man in the grip of the green monster. Hornby had done a deceitful, dishonourable thing. It was incomprehensible, too, that Diana Maynard could not, or would not, see him through the same eyes.

John was no exception to the rule that men in the grip of jealousy find it impossible to think clearly and straightly, or to retain a sense of proportion. Before his eyes was the trim, slender figure of Diana, and the deep-blue eyes which could change in a flash from invitation to mockery; Diana, gorgeous as she had appeared at the Club dance, wearing a low-cut frock of blue velvet; Diana holding her own on the tennis courts with the best of the men; Diana, putting the ball on the green with her drive at the 210-yards third hole; and, sweetest picture of all, Diana in a tender mood at the top of the cliff in the Residency garden after dinner, her downcast face softly illumined by a firefly imprisoned in her hand, and the look in her eyes when, conscious that they had been away from the others for a long time, she whispered as they rejoined the party: "You've been very sweet to me, John. Thank you."

Light and airy as it had been, since that evening John's world had been transformed. Love, which had been no more than a word in a dictionary to him, had suddenly assumed the mantle of reality, passionate, fiercely jealous and unreasonable. As though the pulses were not already beating in his throat so violently that they threatened to choke him, there came from the beach road the hoofbeats of an approaching horse.

Adrian Hornby, his gay good-looks enhanced by the fast ride, swept into the office with the air of a man who had not a care in the world, throwing his double felt hat expertly on to a peg on the other side of the room.

"Morning, John! Hope I'm not late. I had to ride like

hell to get here. What happened to you this morning? We thought we should see you out. That pony of yours hasn't gone lame again, has he?"

"We? Who's 'we'? You and who else?" John's voice grated harshly as he asked his obtuse questions. Adrian, looking up sharply, noted with amazement the look of stark hostility on the other's face. It shocked him, for he was conscious of no reason for it. "What's wrong, John?" he asked, deeply concerned. "Look, old chap, if you're not feeling up to the mark, there's nothing that won't keep. I can easily come in tomorrow, or the day after. I'll walk back to the Fort with you, if you like."

"There's nothing wrong with me, thanks," said John curtly. "I have everything ready."

On a side table was spread out a series of illustrated catalogues and specifications for a diesel-powered electric light plant which Hornby intended installing at the plantation. John was the local agent for the manufacturer.

"Something *is* wrong, John. What is it? If looks could kill I'd drop down in my tracks right now. To hell with all this!" He pointed to the catalogues. "Whatever's wrong let's put it right."

"I wasn't going to say anything," said John, thin-lipped his eyes glinting in ugly fashion, and spitting out his words, "but since you insist, you may as well know that I don't like lies or liars."

"I don't either, John," retorted Hornby, genuinely bewildered. "What of it?"

"You told me last evening you were going home early, as you had some work to do. That was a damned lie, wasn't it?"

"It was nothing of the kind, John. Although it's none of your business I had every intention of going home early. I changed my mind, that's all. Maggie and Diana were taking a walk on The Green and Maggie asked me to come in for a drink. Since when do I have to ask your permission to have a drink at the Residency? You're talking like a bloody fool." Hornby took his hat off the peg where he had

thrown it and made for the door. "I'll give you a day or two to come to your senses, John. All that stuff can wait."

"All things considered," said John slowly, "I think I would prefer you to take your affairs elsewhere. Payments on the last shipments to Singapore will be in on the next mail and I'll draw up a statement of account then. That will give you time to make other arrangements."

At this outburst Hornby looked, and was, dumbfounded. Ordinarily, John Hudd was a placid, even-tempered man, but now he seemed capable of violence. Hornby himself, on the few occasions when he lost his temper, inclined towards violence. Knowing this of himself, he had brought the interview to an end as speedily as possible, for he valued the friendship between them. "John," he said, striving to speak calmly, "I'm not taking that as your last word. Let's say no more now. I'll come and see you some time next week, when we've both had time to think things over. If you're of the same mind then, I'll take my business elsewhere."

Hornby's conciliatory tone inflamed, rather than calmed, John Hudd. "Our affairs can't be wound up too soon for me," he retorted coldly, "and when things are settled, I want nothing more to do with you. Now get out!"

Each of these two, as they parted, was aware of the pity of it all, aware that friendship was too precious a thing to be cast aside lightly.

The irony of it all was that as he mounted his horse and rode away, Adrian Hornby, and for the first time, saw Diana through different eyes. A few hours previously Diana had been to him no more than another pretty, companionable girl. Had he suspected John Hudd's true feelings, he would have stepped aside without a pang. But now it was different. Diana had already begun to assume a different guise. She had become something far more than a pleasant, amusing companion, and if John Hudd believed himself entitled to put up a 'Keep off the grass' sign, he would soon learn his mistake. By the strange alchemy of the heart and human perversity, Diana had become so desirable in Adrian

Hornby's eyes that he marvelled at his own previous blindness.

A wall had been erected between two friends.

V

It was not until three weeks after Diana's arrival in Fort Mallet that Angus McCloskey permitted Jack Maynard to leave the hospital and to take up residence in the small Government bungalow which had been allotted to him.

After breakfast, on the day when Diana was to leave the Residency, Maggie Kennedy walked slowly along the verandah towards her guest's room, anxious to put what she had to say in the past tense.

"You've been terribly sweet to me, Mrs Kennedy," said Diana, who was putting the finishing touches to her packing, "and I simply don't know how to thank you—and Mr Kennedy—for all your kindness."

"When your brother is well enough to go off on patr^r—you must come and stay with us again, my dear. It isn't fit for you to stay in the bungalow alone. We shall be glad to have you. It would make you vain if I told you all the nice things Hugh says about you."

"I wouldn't dream . . ."

"There's something else I want to talk to you about, Diana," said Maggie. "It's about John and Adrian. I'm almost as fond of the pair of them as if they were my own sons, so you must forgive me speaking very plainly. This quarrel between them is simply tragic, and somehow, it's got to be put right."

"Quarrel, Mrs Kennedy? I know of no quarrel."

"Then, my dear, you're the only person in Fort Mallet who doesn't know."

"That sounds as though you don't believe me, Mrs

Kennedy, but I promise you that until this moment I have heard of no quarrel. All I have noticed is that John, for some reason best known to himself, avoids me."

Maggie turned a pair of shrewd grey eyes on Diana, eyes which, if the girl had been lying, would have seen through and beyond the lie. No, Maggie concluded, Diana was speaking the truth, which made it all the more difficult. "I do believe you, my dear. Don't doubt it."

"Forgive me, Mrs Kennedy," looking at the older woman with a clear steady gaze, "but even if they have quarrelled what has it to do with me?"

Was the girl being deliberately obtuse? Maggie could not make up her mind. "It has to do with you, Diana," she said bluntly, "because their quarrel is over you."

"Then they have no right to quarrel over me!" snapped Diana. "What do they think I am? A bone?"

"Right doesn't enter into it, Diana. Nor am I trying to blame you. I'm just asking you to help put things right between them. Fort Mallet, for a good many years, has been a happy station. You'd be surprised how little quarrelling, backbiting and petty jealousy there has been. As people have probably told you already, I'm an interfering old busybody. I rush in where angels fear to tread. It's the only way I can be useful in the world—now. When Hugh and I retire to a cottage in the country in England, it will be nice to think that I helped to keep the peace here and in doing so helped to keep people happy. People are no different here from anywhere else, not intrinsically. If there is a difference, it is only that we have tried so hard to stop silly feuds and quarrels. Life's far too short and Fort Mallet is far too small. Believe me, dear, I'm right."

"I'm sure you are, Mrs Kennedy, but what can I do?"

"You're a woman, Diana. A woman knows without being told, how to keep the peace between two men. The trouble is that some women—and I don't mean you, dear—like to have men snapping and snarling over them. It flatters their vanity, or something."

"I'll do whatever I can, Mrs Kennedy," said Diana with

a quick smile, "but I'm not awfully confident that it will be much."

When Diana had gone, Maggie Kennedy went out to her favourite spot in the garden. On the left the fishing dhows were coming in from a chain of islets some miles off shore, their patched brown sails gay against the brilliant blue of the sea. On the right, looking trim and inviting, was The Green and the little world which revolved around it. Maggie loved Fort Mallet. She had very few other ties in the world, and during the twenty-five years she and Hugh had spent in the East, these had become attenuated to gossamer dimensions. Within a few hundred yards of where she sat was everything and everyone she held most dear.

In the solitude of her garden Maggie usually found that thought processes were clear. Plants and flowers conducted to honest thinking. Suddenly, after a few moments of reverie, she burst into loud laughter at a discovery she had made. She realised, and with amusement, that her attitude to Diana was conditioned by jealousy. She resented Hugh Kennedy's admiration of her, his harmless little gallantries and his unconcealed regret at her departure from their roof. "You're an old fool, Maggie," she chuckled. "That's why you don't like the girl."

That was one of the reasons, but the chief reason was one which Maggie Kennedy would never fully understand because, accurate as she was usually in her analyses of character, her own was a complete mystery to her.

The train of thought which led from this point was interrupted by the arrival of Angus McCloskey who, without ceremony, planted himself in the chair beside her. "You're up to no good, Maggie," he observed easily. "You're chuckling like an evil old crone and you're planning to stick that big nose of yours into things that don't concern you. Isn't that the truth?"

"Maybe you're right, Angus," she replied, using his Christian name which she always did in serious mood. "Maybe I am. Someone has to do something."

"I know what's on your mind, Maggie, and let me tell

you that you're wasting your time. We've learned how to control live steam and dynamite, wild beasts and floods, but there's no way known to us of controlling two randy young sparks like John and Adrian when a blue-eyed wench is playing havoc with their dreams. Let them get it out of their systems in their own sweet way. Don't waste . . .”

“What do you think of her, Angus?” interrupted Maggie.

“I don't think of her, Maggie. I've other and more important things on my mind. If I were twenty-eight years of age, instead of forty-eight, I wouldn't waste time thinking of anything but coaxing her into the nearest convenient bed. I dare say I'd even contemplate the folly of leading her there with a bunch of orange blossom in her hair. But that's because young men have no sense. When I was a student in Edinburgh . . .”

“I don't want to hear any of your Rabelaisian reminiscences, thank you. Be helpful.”

“I can't help. Nobody can help. It's a physiological and anatomical problem, I tell you, and those are two sciences of which I know more than you do. Those two lads are in the grip of forces that are bigger than any of us and the only way we can do any good is to keep them apart. The girl's pretty enough to send St Anthony on the rampage.”

“Please be serious, Angus. It's very sad to see two nice boys like that looking daggers at each other the way they did last night. I'm going to do something, but what?”

“Tell her brother to keep her on a chain.”

“It isn't entirely Diana's fault, Angus. She can't help being a pretty girl . . .”

“Fault!” said McCloskey contemptuously. “Who's talking about fault? Why must women always bring impersonal things down to the personal? Let me put it to you another way. Sulphur, as you may know, is a good blood tonic. Charcoal is an excellent specific for flatulence, while saltpetre, used with discretion, has its uses. Mix the three of them together, touch a match to them and you have an almighty explosion. Now then, if you'll have the goodness to explain to me which of the three is to blame for the explosion, I

shall be most interested. Fault! Lay the blame on God for having made men and women as they are."

When McCloskey had left her to her thoughts, Maggie could derive no comfort from the knowledge that his summation of things was probably a better one than her own.

VI

JACK MAYNARD's admiration for his sister was unbounded, as indeed was his affection. Nearly four years younger than he was, Diana had always been considered the brains of the family, and in Jack's eyes she possessed all the qualities which he lacked and most admired. Her brilliant good-looks were coupled with the kind of poise associated with the *grandes dames* of the eighteenth century. She moved with the grace of a ballet dancer, every movement precise and seemingly effortless. People who did not like her had in the past applied to her the adjective feline. In the physical sense she *was* catlike, but there the resemblance ceased. Diana was far too direct to be catty in the accepted sense of the word.

It was hard to believe that Jack, gangling, loose-jointed and entirely lacking in the social graces, was full brother to the *soignée*, worldly Diana.

"What have you got against John Hudd?" asked Jack with his mouth full, surveying his sister across the luncheon table.

"Nothing, Jack. Why?"

"Come off that, Di!" he laughed. "You're not even polite to him. I'm not the only one who's noticed it."

"I like John. If he would let himself be, I think he's an awfully nice boy. But I can't allow him to assume proprietorial airs. He picked a violent quarrel with Adrian because of me"

"Takes two to make a quarrel," said Jack with the air of a man who had coined the phrase. "None of my affair,

"Of course, but I like John. He's a good bloke. I'd like to invite him here sometimes, but it's a bit awkward."

"Ask him here whenever you like Jack, and provided he doesn't take too much for granted, I'll be nice to him."

"Thanks, Di," said her brother with relief. "I like Adrian too, for that matter. Are you and he serious, by the way? I only ask because you seem to see the hell of a lot of him."

"I'm not on the rampage for a husband, Jack," replied Diana irritably. "And even if I were, I haven't seen a prospective husband in Fort Mallet. I'm young, Jack, and I'd rather be with people near my own age than with the old fogies who are the only alternative."

"That reminds me," said Jack inconsequentially, dismissing the subject. "I saw Maggie a few minutes ago and she asked me to tell you that she's going to have tea at the mission this afternoon and she'd like to take you with her. Says old Ma Gosling will feel hurt if you don't go."

"I've seen Mrs Gosling in the distance, thanks, and that's enough for me. I'm not very good at bun fights, Jack. Mrs Kennedy will have to count me out."

"You can't call Maggie Mrs Kennedy, Di. Nobody does. It's . . ."

"She's thirty years older than I am and she hasn't invited me to call her anything else."

Jack eyed his sister narrowly. "You don't like Maggie, do you, Di? Why?"

"Yes, I like her, Jack. She was awfully kind to me when you were ill. Yes, I like her, but I suppose it is that I've had her thrust down my throat a wee bit too much. I like to form my own opinions of people and I'm not yet ready to join the let's-bow-down-and-worship-Maggie society. Give me time, Jack, and I'll probably like her as much as you seem to do."

Diana always had been, and would remain, a puzzle to her brother. The great difference between them was that she had original ideas and was not frightened to express them. So often, even when she was very young, her ideas

had turned out to be sound. No matter what heresy Diana uttered, Jack would never be able entirely to dismiss it. Now, it was plain, Diana did not share his own unbounded admiration and affection for Maggie Kennedy.

Jack Maynard went back to work with the uncomfortable feeling that he ~~was~~ was out of his depth. It was no new feeling where Diana was concerned. He accepted his position as 'the fool of the family' without hesitation. Diana was the 'clever one' and he gave her an unflinching loyalty. To learn now that Diana had reservations where Maggie Kennedy was concerned; was almost too much to be borne. Maggie was...well, just Maggie. His critical faculties simply refused to function where Maggie was concerned, just as they had always refused where Diana was concerned. He had learned at school the Euclidian axiom that things which were equal to the same thing were equal to one another. Its truth was as evident to him as it had been to Euclid. In fact, it had always seemed so obvious to Jack that its reiteration was absurd. His attitude of mind towards Maggie and Diana was much the same. They stood, each in a different way, upon the topmost pinnacles of his esteem. As he tackled an accumulation of desk work that afternoon, he comforted himself with the reflection that when these two knew each other better, all would be well.

Diana, when her brother had gone to work, found herself appraising the community of which she was now a part through frankly critical eyes. There was much to be said for and against Fort Mallet, and after all, her stay would probably be limited to a year. She loved golf, riding, tennis, swimming and adulation. These were available at will. Ever since her schooldays the last had been hers wherever she had been. There was a certain look in men's eyes which she now took for granted, only noticing its rare absence. There was nothing new about men quarrelling for her smiles, but this, gratifying at first, had become wearisome. It might have been well enough among the troglodytes, but for Diana's taste it suggested too plainly that a woman was a mere chattel, to become the property of the winner.

She—her face hardened at the thought—was no man's chattel. She had not, as she had told her brother, come to Fort Mallet looking for a husband. She had come, partly because she was very fond of Jack, and partly to escape from an unfortunate love affair in England.

What irked Diana most was the need, if her stay were to be pleasant, to placate the womenfolk of Fort Mallet. Most women bored her. In her estimation the women she had met since her arrival—and she had met them all except Mrs Gosling, whom she had seen—were dull, dowdy, middle-aged frumps. The only exception was Mrs Miller, the wife of Albert Miller of the Public Works Department, who was working on the survey of a new road into the interior. Until Diana's arrival, Mrs Miller had been the undisputed belle of Fort Mallet, a position she had occupied by virtue of lack of competition. She was a fluffy, frilly young woman, with tired blonde hair, who made great play with a pair of watery blue eyes. She always appeared to be frightened because of a trick of opening her eyes so wide with wonderment—especially when the Resident was telling a story—that the whites of her eyes were visible all round the irises. She had always been a success with middle-aged men, who felt the need to protect her and their masculinity enhanced by her presence.

When Diana arrived, these middle-aged admirers of Mrs Miller, to quote Angus McCloskey, "dropped her with such a bloody thump that it was heard in Singapore."

Mrs Miller had developed handkerchief-dropping to a fine art, rewarding the gallants who rushed to pick them up with wet, simpering smiles. Latterly, however, and to the lady's great chagrin, the task of restoring her handkerchiefs had devolved upon the Club servants. When in the Club several evenings previously Angus McCloskey had suggested to Mrs Miller that she should buy a retriever, Diana had committed the solecism of laughing. The correct procedure in Fort Mallet, when McCloskey uttered his caustic and frequently outrageous witticisms, was to look shocked and despairing, for the red-headed doctor occupied much

the same position as court jester. The privilege of laughing was confined to the victim.

It is doubtful whether Diana would have survived the incident socially had not the Resident, after a silence of ten seconds, which seemed like ten minutes, burst into hearty laughter, which was taken up by the chorus. In the Resident's eyes Diana could do no wrong, but for the rest of the evening, by way of reparation, he devoted himself with assiduity to Mrs Miller and on two occasions retrieved her handkerchief.

The incident was quickly forgotten by everyone except the dethroned Mrs Miller, whose smile thereafter did not seem to fit whenever Diana appeared.

Adrian Hornby was due to call at teatime, so Diana bestirred herself. She wanted to be ready when he arrived, so that there would be no need to ask him into the bungalow. There were no taxis in Fort Mallet, but if there had been, Diana decided, a ride home in a taxi with Hornby would have been an adventure not to be undertaken lightly. She had lately detected a change in Adrian's manner towards her. The old light and careless basis of their relationship was gone. He had become watchful and demanding, quick to take offence. Without any justification, he was prone to assume proprietorial airs, and when reminded by Diana a day or so previously that, if they were to go on seeing each other, he must mend his ways, she had caught a brief glimpse of an ugly temper. He had controlled himself, but, Diana believed, only just. Kept at arm's length, he could be a pleasant and amusing companion. Diana was loath to quarrel with him, if only for the selfish reason that Fort Mallet offered so little in the way of companionship.

It was only for a year, Diana sighed, surveying herself in the mirror with critical eyes. She was not excessively vain, but she liked what she saw: big, wide-set eyes, shapely, arched eyebrows; a big, firm but generous mouth and slightly raised cheekbones. These last gave her face its faint air of mystery. About Diana's body there was a trim efficiency. Her slender hips were not at all boyish, but

voluptuously feminine. Firm, rounded breasts seemed to defy time itself with the boast that they would never wilt and sag, while her shoulders had a functional beauty which commanded the respect accorded to a first-class piece of engineering. They were at their best on the golf course, where she was going that afternoon with Adrian Hornby. Her swing, with the head of the club running in an almost perfect groove, was so near the 360 degrees of the circle that it was almost an acrobatic feat.

Diana knew everything that a mirror could tell her about herself, but the mirror was incapable of throwing back the photogenic, luminiferous quality of the aura which seemed to surround her. It was a subtle warmth of which people—women as well as men—were aware, without knowing through which sense they received the impression.

In the conventional sense of the word, Diana was not a beauty, but she was so good to look at, so warm and full of the zest of living that the critical faculties were arrested. People had hated Diana—a few—but their hatred had not abated one jot of their admiration for her. It was not necessary to touch her in order to know that her skin fitted her and that her flesh was firm and full of elasticity.

Diana had few illusions regarding her desirability in the eyes of men. Too many had cast themselves and their fortunes at her feet for that. She knew, on the rare occasions when she thought of the matter, that her value on the marriage market was a high one. Thus far in her twenty-three years Diana had merely skated around love. No man had even been able to make her believe that life without him would be drab and empty and meaningless. Until this should occur, she was determined, she would steer clear of entanglements. When, if ever, she met the man of her dreams, his material possessions, she was resolved, would not influence her. Nevertheless, she hoped wistfully that he would be rich, because she loved luxury, good clothes and all the other appurtenances of wealth, and was realist enough to know that she would make a better wife to a rich man than a poor one. The self-reliance which she wore in the manner of an

armour was her way of asserting to herself that, where marriage was concerned, she would never compromise with the high standards she had created. When the right man came along, but only then, she would be ready to shed this self-reliance like an old garment which had served its purpose.

Just as she was taking a last look at herself in the mirror, before donning a beige linen skirt and silk blouse of the same colour, she found herself wishing that custom did not decree that clothes were essential. It was a pity to hide bodies while they were young and lovely. Time enough for that when age had destroyed their beauty.

These thoughts were interrupted by a call from the garden, as Adrian Hornby announced his arrival. "I'm not quite dressed yet," she called. "Find yourself a chair on the verandah and smoke a cigarette. I'll be as quick as I can."

"You're nearly ten minutes late as it is," came Hornby's voice in reply. It was the tone, rather than the words themselves, which nettled Diana, who retorted coldly: "To be exact, I am three minutes late, but even if I were thirty-three minutes late, I won't allow you to talk to me like that. Go and find someone else to play with you, someone who doesn't mind your rudeness."

To this Hornby made no reply, but there came from the verandah the sound of his quick impetuous movements and the bang as a chair was overturned. There followed the crunch of his angry footsteps on the gravel path and then silence.

Diana sighed regretfully. There were few enough distractions in Fort Mallet. Now there was one less. Why did men take so much for granted? Why did they make it impossible to associate with them on a light and friendly basis? Why did they feel it necessary to strut like barnyard roosters when confronted with an attractive woman? It was such a pity, for Adrian, if he would only allow himself to be one, was a thoroughly likeable man.

Marriage, Diana reflected, must solve a lot of problems for a woman. A wedding ring took the place of the 'Sold' tag

which shopkeepers displayed sometimes in their windows, as a sign that further discussion was useless.

VII

ARMED with a list of things she needed, Diana set off in the direction of the Port wearing a frock of a gay flower pattern on a background of cream-coloured Japanese silk which she had bought since her arrival, an exact copy of an expensive one she had acquired in Paris on the way out.

So far as women's clothing was concerned in Fort Mallet, there was little or no competitive element. Clothes were worn to cover the body as coolly as possible consistent with decorum. Most women wore skirts cut from the same white drill used by their husbands, together with cork or pith helmets. Actuated not at all by a desire to be different, but by a love for bright colours, Diana preferred gay prints, flowered silks and linens in pastel shades.

Maggie, whose quick eyes spotted the frock as Diana emerged from the gate of the bungalow, sighed for the days when she would have thought it worth while dressing prettily for a shopping expedition. Through the binoculars she followed Diana until the latter disappeared from view across the bridge which led to the Port. An octogenarian Malay, sitting on the porch of his little house, watched Diana's movements with delight. Never, he reflected, had he seen a European woman so graceful, and, like all his race, he loved colour. Looking up into her eyes as she passed, he nodded and smiled his approval. "The day has begun well," he murmured to his daughter, who stood beside him. Mrs Gosling, drinking tea on the balcony of the Protestant Mission, snorted audible disapproval, holding that the clinging silk frock, which set off Diana's graceful contours to such advantage, merely served to inflame the beast, always latent in the male heart. "I think," said her husband mildly,

armour was her way of asserting to herself that, where marriage was concerned, she would never compromise with the high standards she had created. When the right man came along, but only then, she would be ready to shed this self-reliance like an old garment which had served its purpose.

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ARMED with a list of things she needed, Diana set off in the direction of the Port wearing a frock of a gay flower pattern on a background of cream-coloured Japanese silk which she had bought since her arrival, an exact copy of an expensive one she had acquired in Paris on the way out.

So far as women's clothing was concerned in Fort Mallet, there was little or no competitive element. Clothes were worn to cover the body as coolly as possible consistent with decorum. Most women wore skirts cut from the same white drill used by their husbands, together with cork or pith helmets. Actuated not at all by a desire to be different, but by a love for bright colours, Diana preferred gay prints, flowered silks and linens in pastel shades.

Maggie, whose quick eyes spotted the frock as Diana emerged from the gate of the bungalow, sighed for the days when she would have thought it worth while dressing prettily for a shopping expedition. Through the binoculars she followed Diana until the latter disappeared from view across the bridge which led to the Port. An octogenarian Malay, sitting on the porch of his little house, watched Diana's movements with delight. Never, he reflected, had he seen a European woman so graceful, and, like all his race, he loved colour. Looking up into her eyes as she passed, he nodded and smiled his approval. "The day has begun well," he murmured to his daughter, who stood beside him. Mrs Gosling, drinking tea on the balcony of the Protestant Mission, snorted audible disapproval, holding that the clinging silk frock, which set off Diana's graceful contours to such advantage, merely served to inflame the beast, always latent in the male heart. "I think," said her husband mildly,

"that you are being a little harsh. I haven't the privilege of knowing the young woman, but to me the effect is pleasing."

"Huh!" retorted his spouse. "The trouble with you, Henry, is that you carry your charity too far. Like all the rest of the ~~ladies~~ you're putty where a pretty face is concerned. Look at the disgusting way she swings her hips . . . and in front of the natives, too. Deliberately provocative, that's what I call it."

"Tut, tut! my dear, or I shall be tempted to suspect you of envy."

Henry Gosling chuckled as, spluttering with indignation, his wife went into the mission building to set about the Lord's work with even more vigour than usual. Like so many of her kind, Mrs Gosling lacked the wide charity and compassion of the Christ she professed, taking it upon herself to censor the Gospels. Christ's tolerance towards Mary Magdalene and other sinners was, in her mind, a confession of an inexplicable weakness in the Lord's character and, as such, to be hidden rigorously from the young. Hell fire was her specialty and with such gusto did she preach it that her hearers could almost smell the brimstone. But she too had her weaknesses. A sick child's needs came before her own and for many years she had been a staunch and loyal wife.

Diana, unconscious of the interest she had aroused, went on down the beach road to Charley's Universal Emporium. Charley, or as he was named in the Kwangtung village where he first saw the light, Chow-li, catered to a bewildering variety of local needs. His shop was a stocktaker's nightmare, but Charley had a system which defied analysis and which he alone understood. His shelves were packed with the canned goods of Europe, America and Australia; textiles from Japan, Manchester and Bradford; a large assortment of hardware, paints, cordage, saddlery, patent medicines, Chinese delicacies, toys, fishing tackle, golf balls, tennis balls, with a separate establishment across the road where his brother sold wines, spirits, tobacco, cigarettes and cigars.

Without Charley, in brief, life at the Fort and the Port would have foundered in the mire of its own deficiencies. In addition to these activities, Charley was the settlement's only banker and his paper was good in Singapore and Penang, Hongkong, Canton, Manila, ~~and~~ ^{and} Kuching, Macassar, Banjermassin, as well as in the principal ports of Java and Sumatra. Lastly, he was the ~~best~~ ^{best} pearl buyer within a radius of several hundred miles and was reputed to understand pearls as few men alive.

Charley liked Diana. He liked her not only because she was good to look at, but because she knew what she wanted, asked for it with a brisk assurance and made her decision—to buy or not to buy—instantly. He was tired of women who used his shop to kill time, their own and his, and seemed unable to make up their minds.

At this early hour—it was barely seven o'clock—Charley was not busy. "Come inside office, missy, and I show you my pearls," he said, implementing a promise made a week previously.

Pearls, where Charley was concerned, were a hobby rather than a business, although he made money out of his dealings. He loved pearls, believed them to be the most beautiful inanimate things in creation, and by the handling of them could satisfy the aesthetic demands of his nature. That they were profitable too was just that much better.

Pearling out of Port Mallet itself was almost at an end, but local men were employed throughout the Malay Archipelago and as far as the Philippines and Broome. Many of the pearls which passed through Charley's hands were stolen and entrusted to him for sale.

Diana followed Charley into a poky little office at the back of the premises, where, surprisingly, was a modern steel safe, secured by a combination lock, a receptacle entirely beyond the capacity of local thieves. Before opening the safe, Charley took down from a shelf a sawn-off shotgun, which he placed on the table near to his hand. He was growing old and somewhat feeble. His sons were away in far countries and no longer able to protect him.

The door of the safe swung open to reveal, carelessly thrown into an empty biscuit tin, several quarts of baroque pearls of negligible commercial value. These Charley did not trouble to show his visitor although, malformed as they were, they were still beauty. Soon a score or more of small glass boxes, each with cotton wool stood on the table. Each box contained a rare pearl. Among them was the pride of his collection, a black pearl of some eighty-two carats, which had come into his possession twenty years previously. Charley looked up eagerly into Diana's face to observe her reaction. The rapt, almost reverent, expression he saw satisfied him. Evidently this beautiful young woman had an eye for beauty other than her own, and could see the latent fires behind the sombre black surface of the sphere. In turn, he produced several large pink pearls, one of them drop-shaped, and all immensely valuable. Then Charley, with infinite care, laid out on a strip of black velvet nineteen pearls, so perfectly matched as to colour and size that they were indistinguishable. "Must catch many more same kind, but maybe Chow-li not live so long time. Then sons must catch more."

Diana knew enough of pearls to know that if the necklace were ever completed, it would be worth a fabulous sum.

From the shop came the sounds of customers. Hurriedly, Charley gathered together his pearls and returned them to the safe. "Thank you, Mr Chow-li," said Diana graciously. "They were so beautiful."

Charley beamed. He not only appreciated her appreciation, but her use of his correct name, prefaced by the mister. He wore "Charley" with irritation which, because it would have been bad for business, he did not show. The name had been pinned on to him many years previously and from the beginning he had sensed vaguely that it was faintly contemptuous.

Diana completed her purchases in the shop with the help of a young Chinese assistant and, just as she was leavin', there came the sound of a ship's siren. The mail boat from Singapore had arrived.

Actuated by idle curiosity, Diana stood under the corrugated iron shelter at the end of the jetty, as the launch, loaded with mail aft and with four or five white-clad figures forward, approached the shore. There was something fascinating about the arrival of this only link with the outside world. Life in this remote outpost acquired a new and almost exciting tempo on mail days. News from the other side of the world; new people; new problems.

Chow-li, hoping wistfully that the ship had brought home one of his sons, came and stood beside Diana at the top of the stairs, peering at the faces of the newcomers half hidden by white sun-helmets. When he saw that all the passengers were Europeans, Chow-li seemed to sag with his disappointment.

The first man ashore, his face invisible directly underneath the jetty, jumped with effortless ease while the launch was still some six feet distant from the landing-stage. With three long strides he came up the rickety stairs and, standing at the top, looked around him eagerly. A moment later, to Diana's surprise, he was pumping Chow-li's hand with every evidence of pleasure.

There are some people in the world who, for no obviously discernible reason, stand out from their surroundings with startling clarity, and are singled out for special attention. They are to be seen in crowded restaurants sometimes. *Maitres d'hôtel* see them at once and find them tables when others have to wait. The newcomer was one of these. Looking at him, Diana amused herself trying to determine just what were the qualities which made him so conspicuous and—she fumbled for the word—so pleasing. Like all the other men, he wore the standard uniform of the East, a white duck suit, turned out by a thousand Chinese tailors for something under ten Straits dollars per suit. But unlike the others, he gave the carelessly-made suit an air of distinction. The man could not have been called handsome, but the combined effect of strong features, shrewd and twinkling eyes and a reckless, good-humoured attitude to life were—again Diana had to fall back on the adjective 'pleasing'. This,

evidently, was a man who loved life, extracting from it more than most of his fellows. He had light-brown hair and eyes which matched it almost perfectly.

Quite evidently Chow-li held the newcomer in high esteem, for he was too secret of his pleasure, and Chow-li was a man who did not wear his emotions on his sleeve.

Diana, however, realising with some embarrassment that her interest in the stranger had exceeded the bounds of politeness, as she stepped from under the corrugated iron shelter into the blazing sunshine of the beach road, Chow-li, suddenly appearing at her elbow, said: "I like you meet ol' fren'. His father my ol' fren' too." The old Chinese mumbled a name, which Diana did not catch, but she turned with a smile and allowed Chow-li to perform the introduction.

"I," said the newcomer, "am Jules Duvivier. The name is a difficult one for my good friend Chow-li. My father is Gaston Duvivier and we are Duvivier et Fils of the Place Vendôme. You have heard of us, yes?"

"What woman hasn't, Monsieur Duvivier? Three months ago, or perhaps it was four," continued Diana, "I stood for ten minutes looking at your windows and wishing I were rich."

"But why did you not come inside? Why was I not told? God made pearls especially for skin like yours. To think that I was there, in Paris, and nobody told me you were there . . .!"

Diana laughed unaffectedly at the mock horror she saw in the Frenchman's face.

"But what are you doing here—in this terrible place?" the other asked. "Do not tell me that you are married to some sad British official. Please do not tell me that, for I do not think I could endure it. It is not, you must understand," he added hastily, "that I do not like the British. That is not so. Among them I have many good friends."

"No, Monsieur Duvivier, I am not married to some sad British official. In fact, I am not married."

"Then," said the other, aghast, "what are you doing here? *C'est incroyable!* I come to this *pays perdu*, to buy maybe

some pearls from my friend Chow-li. I find you wearing a frock from the Rue de la Paix. It was there that you found it, is it not so? A copy? Well, that is the same thing. In matters such as that, you understand, Jules Duvivier makes no mistakes . . . and you tell me you are engaged. There is one more proof that the British do not understand beauty. Now, if this were a French colony, how long would you suppose you would be permitted to remain unmarried?" Duvivier did not wait for a reply to his rhetorical question, but continued: "Most terrible of all is that the ship sails tonight at midnight and I must sail with her."

"That is too terrible," said Diana, matching his tone and entering into his tragi-comic mood. "I shall need a bathtowel for my tears."

"Now you mock me. That is not kind. The simple heart of Jules Duvivier is hurt. I will go now to discuss some business with my friend Chow-li, but this evening, if you will be so kind, you will drink a bottle of champagne with me at the Club. The good Doctor Mac shall introduce us most officially and all will be well. At six o'clock? It is a promise?"

Greatly to her own amazement, Diana found herself nodding smiling assent, although she was uncomfortably aware that her brief conversation had already attracted the attention of a number of other people. Fort Mallet was too small for the least social indiscretion to escape notice.

VIII

ANGUS McCLOSKEY was a more than ordinarily good pianist, who played strictly for his own amusement. If people cared to listen, they were welcome to do so, but he was indifferent equally to their applause or tastes. When, at Jules Duvivier's request, he had performed the formal introduction to Diana, he took his whiskey over to the piano,

scorning to drink the champagne which was offered to him. "I'm not young enough to be amused by the bubbles," he told them, "not old enough to need it as a tonic."

The moonlight made McCloskey to play some of the lilting Viennese waltzes. In a daze of gaiety, oblivious to all around him, he launched into the strains of the *Blue Danube*, while memory went back to a young when so many things had seemed otherwise. His back was to the people scattered about the large room, so they did not see the bitter-sweet tears which gathered in his eyes.

Jules Duvivier stood up abruptly, arms outstretched, his eyes full of invitation. A moment later he and Diana, as though they had danced together for years, were whirling around the floor, breathlessly exchanging badinage and nonsense.

"I wish," said Jules intensely, when they returned to the table, raising his glass, "that it was not necessary for me to leave tonight."

Diana spared him the banality of asking why. "I wish it too," she said soberly. "I think you would be fun."

Then, since dancing was easier than talking, they danced. Two other couples joined them. A little later John Hudd led Maggie Kennedy out on to the floor, and Mrs Miller dragged her reluctant husband around two or three times until she realised that any comparison between Diana and herself must necessarily be to her own disadvantage.

Jules Duvivier and Diana danced superbly. Soon their effortless ease shamed the others into becoming spectators, and they had the floor to themselves. "In two months' time I will come back," said Jules softly. "You will be here?"

"I expect so."

Duvivier fell silent. At various times he had clasped necklaces of precious stones and pearls around the necks of some of the world's loveliest women, but not one of them had been able to stir him as he was now stirred. Wild, reckless thoughts raced through his mind. As they danced behind a potted palm, he kissed her neck and, although Diana recovered herself quickly, he felt her go limp in his arms for

a second. "Take me back to the table, please," she said with a shiver. There was a round of applause when they sat down.

A few moments later came the impatient sound of the ship's siren. The spell was broken. Duvivier turned and, laughing goodbye to everyone. Diana, realising with a pang of embarrassment how conspicuous she had made herself, said that she might as well be hanged for a horse. She turned and, braving the scandalised looks cast in her direction, took his arm and walked out into the darkness.

"Promise me something," whispered Duvivier.

"If it's something reasonable, yes."

"Promise me that when I come back, if I am not away more than three months, you will not be married."

"That's easy," laughed Diana. "I promise that. I thought . . ."

The sentence remained unfinished. She felt herself held in a pair of strong arms while passionate kisses rained down upon her. Protest would have been useless, even if she had desired to protest.

Then he was gone, without another word. Diana did not know quite what she felt. There would be time to collect her thoughts later. The immediate problem was to face the battery of eyes—some of them she knew would be hostile—which awaited her in the Club.

There was a vacant chair at the table where the Kennedys were sitting. Assuming a nonchalance which she did not feel, Diana dropped into it, fanning herself with a magazine. "Thank you, my dear," said Hugh Kennedy, beaming, "that was the prettiest dancing I have seen for years. I wonder that you're not a professional."

"I would have been," said Diana, "only Dad wouldn't hear of it."

Adrian Hornby, a little red in the face and not quite at ease, took another chair facing Diana. "We were just congratulating Miss Maynard on her dancing," observed the Resident. "She puts us all to shame, don't you think?"

"Where has your partner gone?" asked Maggie Kennedy. "I suppose he came on the mail boat. I've seen him before somewhere. Who is he?"

"He's the—er—American—can't remember his name—who comes every year to buy pearls," replied the Resident.

"How—when did you meet him, my dear?" asked Maggie.

"Charley introduced us," replied Diana. "Then Dr McCloskey did it over again. He seems a very nice man. I wish he were staying."

"You know, Diana," said Hornby, trying to sound calm and reasonable, "you ought to be more careful. Charley's a good fellow and all that, but he's hardly a judge of who's fit for you to meet. If you ask me, the fellow's a shocking-looking bounder."

"But nobody did ask you, Adrian," retorted Diana sweetly. "Jules Duvivier is a most charming man, who incidentally, dances divinely. He makes you look clumsy on the dance floor. That's probably why you don't like him."

"I was talking for your good—not mine," said Hornby airily. "If you want to make an exhibition of yourself, it's your affair, I suppose."

"You've no right to talk to Diana like that," said an angry voice.

Hornby turned round to face John Hudd. "Keep your nose out of things that don't concern you."

"I think it's high time we all went to bed," said Maggie tactfully. "Come along, Hugh."

The Kennedys and two or three others left the Club, until only Diana, Adrian Hornby, John Hudd and Angus McCloskey remained. The latter, very drunk, sat back in his chair with a smile of cynical amusement. "Seconds out of the ring!" he called.

"Sit down, both of you," said Diana to the younger men, her eyes blazing with anger. "I've got something to say to you...."

"You're wasting time," said McCloskey. "Nothing you

can *say* will have the smallest effect. Water off duck's back, just like that. They are in the grip of something elemental, where reason has no place. They can't kill that good-looking Frenchman, so they want to ~~kill~~ ^{kill} him. I'll have 'em have it out and promise to marry the ~~wife~~ ^{wife} in the morning. I'll patch up the loser."

"Please be quiet, Dr McCloskey," ~~said~~ ^{she said} ~~biting~~ ^{biting} her lip.

"Call me Mac. Everyone else does."

"Very well, I will. Shut up, Mac, and let me talk."

Signalling for another drink, the doctor lay back to listen.

"Now then, both of you," continued Diana, "I'd like you to know that neither of you—neither of you, do you understand?—has any right to interfere in my affairs. I'll dance with whom I please, when I please. Furthermore, I want nothing to do with either of you until you make friends. You were friends before I came here and there isn't any reason why you shouldn't be friends now. I won't have you brawling over me like a—like a pair of hooligans. And now, shake hands and let's forget it."

There was brief silence, broken by John Hudd. "You're quite right, Diana. We've both behaved shockingly and, for for my part, I'm sorry." He rose to his feet and, facing Hornby, who still remained slumped in his chair, offered his outstretched hand. Hornby rose slowly, his face quite expressionless. He appeared to be hesitating, fighting some inner battle. For several seconds, which seemed much longer, he gazed at the other's hand. Then, suddenly, his eyes blazed fury. Changing his stance, he drove his fist to the point of John Hudd's jaw. It was a cruel, savage blow, delivered with all his weight behind it.

John Hudd fell and as he did so, his head struck the iron base of a table. He remained quite motionless.

"... seven, eight, nine, ten, out!" came McCloskey's amused voice. "We'll clear a ring and you two young sparks can get it all out of your systems."

It was the look of blank horror on Diana's face which brought McCloskey back to his senses and to a realisation

that the situation was less funny than it had seemed. Following the direction of Diana's eyes, he turned to see the prostrate John Hudd.

Trainee, McCloskey said. McCloskey shook his head violently, as though to clear away the fume of alcohol that stood between him and clear thinking. Amused indolence left him like a flash. Beside Hudd, he felt his pulse and lifted his head. "Go to the hospital for a stretcher," he said to two Chinese servants who stood, their eyes devoid of expression, surveying the scene. "Hurry!"

"How bad is it, Mac?" asked Diana in a frightened whisper.

"Bad, very bad! Can't say more now. You can do no good by staying here. Better go home and tell your brother what has happened. He'll know what to do."

Adrian Hornby, a twisted smile on his face, looked long and searchingly at Diana and from her to the body of John Hudd on the floor. With a shrug of the shoulders and a short laugh, he looked once more at Diana, who was aghast at the ferocity she read in his face. Turning on his heel, Hornby strode out of the Club. A few moments later there came the sound of muffled hoofbeats as he cantered across The Green.

Diana lingered, appalled by the turn of events and fascinated by the abrupt transition of McCloskey from drunkenness to sobriety. There was a strange expression on the doctor's face, from which all the callous, cynical amusement had been wiped away. The new McCloskey was like a palimpsest, emerging from behind the sharper calligraphy of a later scribe. "I suppose," Diana said despairingly, "that it was all my fault."

"It was all your fault, my dear," said McCloskey gently, "but you've no need to reproach yourself. The fault—if it can be called that—can be traced back to the jumbled pattern of your great-grandparents' chromosomes. You're what they made you. You're the end-product of a pattern created a century before you were born. You're too lovely, God help

you! Here we're all starved for beauty like yours and just seeing you plays havoc with us. Young Hornby at base is a decent fellow, but the sight of another man warming himself at your beauty turned him into a beast for a few seconds Go now and don't let the boy round somehow. I have a feeling he wasn't meant to be rounded off like this

Diana, as she walked homewards, was possessed of a blind terror. Inextricably mixed with terror was a sense of guilt, neither of which she understood. In that lonely empty Club lounge, she knew, an evil force had been unleashed, impelling a decent young man to do a dastardly thing. Who had unleashed that evil force? And why?

IX

JACK MAYNARD, wearing uniform, his white helmet tucked under his arm, stood stiffly before the Resident's desk, watching with anxious eyes while the latter read a type-written report. On the other side of the bare office sat Angus McCloskey, his face lined and grey with fatigue.

"It must have been a painful task writing this report, Maynard," said the Resident kindly, "but Campbell's absence makes you the senior police officer here at the present time. Duty often forces us to do distasteful things. Whatever the outcome of this unfortunate affair, you and your sister have my personal sympathy."

"Thank you, sir."

"Will Hudd pull through?" asked the Resident, turning to McCloskey.

"I think so. He has a very severe concussion. His skull is fractured where he hit the corner of the table. I'll know better by this evening."

"Action can't wait until this evening, I'm afraid," said Kennedy with a sigh. "From what you have told me, this

was a brutal, premeditated assault. A decent young fellow—I always liked Hudd—lies between life and death because of it. Almost as bad is the appalling example to the rest of the community. You can't expect to uphold the law—all of us. If Hudd is charged with assault, Hornby will have to face it manfully. If he does, and the boy lives it won't be Hornby's fault. He's got the right and the decency to make an enquiry. I'm sorry for Maynard, but events must take their course. You'll have to go out and bring in Hornby yourself. I presume he'll have the sense to make no trouble, but you are authorised to use force if necessary."

"Will my sister have to appear, sir, do you think?" asked Maynard in a distressed voice.

"I hardly think so, my boy," replied the Resident. "The assault took place in the presence of Dr McCloskey and the Club servants. Unless Hornby disputes their testimony on any point—and I don't like to think the man will be bad enough for that—your sister can be left out of it. My private advice to you—quite unofficially, you understand—is to mention this to Hornby when you see him. I can't believe that he will want to humiliate your sister any more than he has already. Good morning, Maynard. On your way."

A silence fell across the room after Jack Maynard had left. It was broken by the Resident. "You know, Mac, this is a damnable business. Ordinarily I'm against having unattached females in a place like this and I would be now, only she's such a charming girl. While she was under our roof, Maggie and I grew quite fond of her. When you have guests living in the house with you, you know, it doesn't take long to find out if they have a hairy heel. I'd do a lot to spare her any needless unpleasantness, but my hands are tied."

"And Maggie shares your enthusiasm about the girl?" queried McCloskey with an irritating smile.

"Of course she does," was the testy reply. "Why do you ask?"

"I just wondered, that's all."

"What are you implying, Mac?"

"Nothing, Hugh, nothing at all. It happens that I share your liking for the girl, without any reservations whatever, but I think that if I were Resident with God, I am not—I would have a private word with Mr. Maynard and convey to him the idea that it would be a good idea for his sister to go on to New Zealand. . . . You're going, and wait for him there. . . ."

"But for God's sake why, Mac? We have so much youth and beauty here that we can afford to lose a little we have. I'd stake my life that the girl's as straight as a gun barrel . . . Why, I'd be proud if she were my daughter. What's behind all this, Mac? What are you trying to say?"

"Simply this, Hugh," replied McCloskey, "that through no fault of her own, I grant you, the girl is like a powder keg here. She's too lovely, too . . . disturbing. It's like new wine in old bottles. Where else in the world, do you think, would men cluster round a watery-eyed hatrack like that Mrs Miller? and why? Because they are sex-starved. That's the reason and you know it. Well, isn't it plain then, that if they can get all worked up about *her*, the effect of the Maynard girl on them is unpredictable? However, thank God the decision's yours and not mine. . . . I'm going over to the hospital and then I'm going to try to snatch an hour or two of sleep. See you at lunch."

"I wish," said Kennedy, "I could see it all as clearly as you seem to. I'm worried, deeply worried."

The door closed and Hugh Kennedy was alone with his thoughts. He was a kindly, uncomplicated man, who dealt truthfully and fairly with his fellows. There was no genius in him, no brilliance, which was perhaps one of the reasons why his reputation stood high in a service which traditionally mistrusted these qualities. He was profoundly worried. The story of the violent scene in the Club appalled him. He was appalled at the fact, but more than this, his faith in his own judgment of men was shaken. He had known and liked Hornby for several years. He believed him capable of almost any light-hearted folly, but it was still hard to envisage him as the author of a brutal and, on the facts, treacherous assault.

The Resident's sympathy went to Diana and her brother, for no nice woman liked to be the focal point of an incident such as this. It would be quite impossible to hush up the incident, for it was too small. It was, without a doubt, the talk of the town at every breakfast-table in the Foreign Quarter, and at the Port, it had been well chewed during the morning.

McCloskey found Maggie in the garden. He launched at once into his subject. "This unpleasant affair isn't going to make things easy for that poor girl, you know. I wonder what's the best thing to be done."

"With John lying unconscious in the hospital, Hugh, and Adrian facing a criminal charge, I'm afraid I haven't time to think of Diana's troubles. She's a nice child, but you can't tell me, Hugh Kennedy, that she didn't in some way or another lead those boys up the garden path. I'm sorry for her, but don't let's lose our sense of proportion. Here comes Angus. He'll have news for us."

Maggie's attitude shocked the Resident. As a woman, he mused, she might have been expected to see things through Diana's eyes. But women, as he well knew, were odd creatures. They had a way of complicating simple issues and of allowing impulse and prejudice to influence their judgments. From little things Maggie had said—or sometimes refrained from saying—he had sensed all along that where Diana was concerned, she had reservations. It would all come out in time. Trust Maggie for that. But it would be in her time.

McCloskey's tread was heavy as he came across The Green. "There's been no change," he said briefly. "I shan't know anything until this evening. I'm going home to snatch a couple of hours sleep. See you at noon."

The Kennedys were just preparing to take their guests into the Residency dining-room, when a servant thrust a note upon a silver salver under the Resident's nose. The note read: "Regret disturbing you but must see you at once." It was signed by Jack Maynard, who was waiting in the office.

"What is it, Maynard?" asked Kennedy irritably. "Surely, it's nothing that won't keep until after lunch?"

"You'll have to be the judge of that, sir," said Maynard. "I rode out to Hornby's estate, in accordance with your instructions. He was not there. The servant said that they had not seen him since he left. I was just preparing to leave when his horse came trotting into the compound. I immediately sent for a search. We found him about a mile back. He was alive, but badly injured, sir."

"Where is he now?" asked Kennedy.

"A stretcher party is bringing him back to the hospital, sir. I rode ahead so as to have everything ready for him. He's in a pretty bad way, sir, but he was unconscious and suffering no pain."

"You were quite right, of course, to let me know at once, Maynard. Thank you. Will there be time for the doctor to eat his lunch? Poor chap! He was up all night and he's about all in. . . ."

"The stretcher party can't be here in less than an hour, sir. I'll warn them at the hospital."

X

FOR more than an hour, idly pretending to read an out-of-date London newspaper, Diana had sat upon the Club verandah, waiting for McCloskey to emerge from the hospital, whose front gate was just visible from where she sat. When he finally emerged, instead of making for the Club, he went in the direction of his own bungalow. Diana set off immediately to intercept him.

"Come and drink a cup of tea with me," said the doctor, "unless, of course, you think it will scandalise the neighbours."

"How are they?" asked Diana eagerly.

"Which one of them are you most anxious about?"

"Neither, Mac, and you know it," retorted Diana. "To

me they are just a couple of sick boys and, try as I will, I can't escape a feeling of guilt; although I know perfectly well that most of it was my fault. But people look at me, Mac, as if I were a murderer."

"That's all right, Diana. You're being too sensitive. Well, we've had the news, and most of it is good. Three days ago I didn't mind telling you now, I was very worried about John Hudd. Young Hudd recovered consciousness last night and, in a week or two, he'll be as good as new. Verby will recover too, but he's going to need the kind of care that I can't give him. He's a job for a plastic surgeon. He took a terrible toss that night and it looks as though his face hit the ground first. . . ."

"You mean, Mac, that he'll be disfigured?"

"I'm afraid so. The poor lad's lost an eye too. His jaw was broken, and he's lucky to be alive."

"Poor Adrian! He was such a nice-looking boy. Even now I can't think what possessed him. . . ."

Even as she spoke, Diana was aware of how inadequate her words were.

"Within a few minutes of recovering consciousness, John Hudd asked to see you, Diana. It's too soon yet, because I don't want him excited. But will you go and talk to him when I say the word?"

"I don't know, Mac. I just don't know," Diana faltered. "It may seem very hard to you, but I can't help remembering that there's my side to all this. Whatever I do, it seems, I'm wrong. If I don't go and see him, I'm inhuman. If I do go, then I shall be accused of encouraging him and"—her voice took on the edge of hysteria—"I didn't, I didn't, I didn't."

"It's only the women, Diana," said McCloskey soothingly. "When a canary gets loose among a flock of sparrows, they peck it to death. It's different and has more beautiful plumage, which has been a crime since the world was young. If you had paddle teeth, wore elastic-sided boots and steel-rimmed spectacles, all the women would be on your side and of course, the men wouldn't be interested one way or

another. It's just as simple as that, my dear girl, and you're crazy if you allow it to bother you."

"I'd like to believe you, Mac. I'll try."

"What's horrified the women, John and Adrian being hurt, is that I was dancing with you the entire evening. He's been here before, but has never noticed the existence of one of us. I was dancing while he was here. That's something I can never forgive you for. And a Frenchman, too! Didn't you know that all Frenchmen were supposed to be dangerous and immoral? Take that simpering Miller woman, for example. I'll bet that every night when her husband is away she looks under the bed for a man. She hopes it's going to be a man like Jules Duvivier, who'll seize her by the hair and rape her. It's because she only finds a chamber pot there that she looks at you so sourly. You are all the things she'd like to be but isn't."

"Thank you Mac," said Diana, laughing despite herself. "I'm glad you don't like Mrs Miller either. One of these days I'm going to be so rude to her that . . ."

"There you are wrong, Diana. If it ever comes to an exchange of dirty cracks, you'll be the loser. Be nice to her. You can afford it."

"You know a frightening amount about human nature—about women, Mac. Where did you learn it?"

"In the hard school of experience, my dear, when you were burping in your cradle." There was a far-off look in McCloskey's eyes as he spoke. "But latterly I've learned a great deal about human nature from Jimmie. Finish your tea and I'll introduce you. I shall be very interested to know what Jimmie thinks about you. Excuse me a moment and I'll just tell him that a lady is coming to visit him."

Diana was less sensitive than most young women of her age, certainly less sensitive to public opinion, but in the last forty-eight hours she would have needed to be pachydermatous had she not sensed the hostility of the women with whom she was in daily contact. In the Club silence

fell at her approach, while any remarks made in her presence had been so tactful that they were almost insulting. Mrs Gosling, however, had the courage of her convictions, had none of the fear of hints. "I don't know what God's idea of beauty is," she had created some women beautiful and others hideous. Mrs Gosling had remarked the previous evening, "at" rather than to Diana, "but I am quite sure He doesn't so that beauty should ensnare fine young men in their deaths. To my way of thinking—and I may be old-fashioned—the female body should not only be clothed, but its outlines concealed decently."

The good lady was talking in a needlessly loud voice to Mrs Pott, wife of the Government Botanist. Mrs Pott, an acid, horse-faced lady, whose false teeth did not fit very well, agreed. Both of them looked pointedly at Diana who, instead of dropping her eyes, stared them out of countenance. "If you were talking about yourselves," said Diana, in penetrating tones which could be heard all over the Club lounge, "I'm sure everyone will agree with you. Would you like it put to the vote?"

When the discomfited ladies had hurriedly left the Club, breathing fire and slaughter, Diana regretted her outburst. "I'm sorry, Mrs Kennedy," said Diana contritely, for she had been sitting with the Kennedys at the time, "but really that holy old frump went too far."

The Resident guffawed loudly, to be rewarded by a glare from Maggie. "The fact that you are young and good-looking," said Maggie in reproof, "should make you generous enough to overlook that sort of thing. Mrs Gosling should have had more sense—and charity—to say such a thing, but two blacks don't make a white. Besides, we're too small a community for open quarrelling."

"That, really, is the important matter," interposed the Resident. "I don't want to justify what Diana said, but . . ."

"But you do, Hugh, you do!"

"As I was about to say, my dear," he continued with upraised eyebrows, "Diana had extreme provocation. It's—it's all most regrettable," he added lamely.

The return of McCloskey cut across Diana's recollections of this unpleasant exchange. "Jimmie", he announced, "is performing his toilet. He likes to do this when he meets new people. I've told him, of course, and he's quite excited."

Angus McCloskey had acquired Jimmie when he was little more than a month old. He was a grateful Malay patient. Now, almost five years later, he was a magnificent specimen of his race, a trifle over five feet in height and immensely powerful. He lived in a specially-built cage at the end of the garden furthest from the house. For over a year he had lived without a cage until the Resident had insisted, in the interests of public safety, that he be properly secured. It had taken Jimmie several months to get over the affront. "I object strongly," Kennedy had said, "to my shaving brush being borrowed by a dissolute ape."

Jimmie, like his master, could find comfort in a bottle. The happiest evenings of his life were those spent with McCloskey, a bottle of whisky between them, while the latter, in gentle, confidential tones, discussed almost anything under the sun. To see them thus and to watch the understanding looks which from time to time crossed Jimmie's face, was to set up in the mind of the beholder a train of highly unorthodox thought.

When Diana arrived Jimmie was still busy with his toilet. A tin can of coconut oil was beside him. From this he took great scoops which he rubbed vigorously into the densely matted hair on his head, shoulders, arms and chest, until it all glistened like a butcher's forelock. He took not the slightest notice of McCloskey and Diana. To remove the oil from his hands, Jimmie took a handful of dry dust, with which he went through all the motions of washing. This done, he wiped his hands clean of the mixture of oil and dust upon an old sack close at hand, and walked over to a mirror, intent upon what he was doing and oblivious of everything else. Hanging beside the mirror on a long string was a heavy antimony comb. Seizing this, Jimmie began combing himself with great care. His immensely long arms enabled him

to comb a long way down his back, but it was upon the head, arms and chest that he lavished most attention, taking pains to make sure that where it was matted.

"He's a good boy," said Diana in a whisper, without quite meaning it.

"For his sake don't let him hear you say that!" said McCloskey. "He'd be most offended. Jimmie, I would have you understand, is a loyal friend. You couldn't bribe Jimmie to betray me. There's nothing human about him, unless it's his lack of Christian forbearance. I'll grant you he hasn't much of that."

At times, Diana decided, the doctor's caustic tongue was not to her taste. She found herself wondering whether it was all a pose, or whether at some time or another he had been badly treated, and if the latter, whether it had been a woman.

Jimmie, meanwhile, grinning with satisfaction into the mirror, turned to where three aprons hung upon hooks. These were green, red and a dirty white, respectively.

"Which colour apron would you like Jimmie to wear?" asked McCloskey.

"Green, I think," replied Diana.

"Then be so good as to tell him so."

Jimmie stood in front of the aprons, waiting a little impatiently to be told which he was to wear. "Jimmie," said Diana, feeling not a little foolish as she did so, "please put on the green apron—the green one."

Instantly, the ape chose the apron indicated and tied it securely round his waist. This done, he came forward, almost mincingly, to the front of the cage, where his visitors stood. With a deliberation which from a human being would have been insulting, and from an *orang-utan* was merely disconcerting, he surveyed Diana from top to toe.

"How do you do, Jimmie?" asked Diana, feeling a little ridiculous as she did so. For reply the *orang-utan* smote his cavernous chest in a way which suggested that he understood the purport of the question, but he continued to keep his dark eyes fixed upon his visitor.

Diana had never seen an ape before. She was aware

vaguely of the Darwinian theory that Man and the Ape had a common ancestry, but no more. Now, however, she found herself surveying Jimmie with the most deep, concentrated interest which she ~~readiness~~ had ever known. Three whole minutes passed thus, during which Diana's thoughts and fancies went through Diana's mind. There was a ~~curious~~ expression that behind the dark curtain of Jimmie's cage there was an intense longing for articulacy, a burning desire to bridge the gulf that lay between them. This impression was heightened a moment or so later when, from Jimmie's ungainly body, came a piteous cry of grief. It was like the sobbing of a child in acute misery, a cry that went back across æons of time to when—if Charles Darwin were right—Man and Ape began their divergence from the ancestral pattern, and Man forged ahead, leaving the Ape groping blindly for the blessed gift of articulacy, by which alone one generation could pass on its accumulated knowledge to the next.

Again Jimmie uttered his weird, heart-rending cry. With the gesture of a small boy, seeking to be a man, he brushed away imaginary tears.

"I've never known him behave like this," said McCloskey in a low troubled voice. "I don't know quite what to make of it."

Timidly, Jimmie's arm came through the bars until his hand touched the floppy Manila straw hat which Diana was wearing. With great gentleness he removed the hat from her head. "That isn't polite, Jimmie," said the doctor reprovingly. Instantly, the hat was replaced.

"If he wants it, let him have it," said Diana.

Jimmie turned to McCloskey with a look which plainly said: "I told you so." Then, grinning with pleasure, he removed the hat and drew it through the bars. For a little while he turned it round and round in his hands and then, with the utmost deliberation, went across his cage and hung it on a hook.

"I'm still waiting to know whether he approves of me," said Diana.

As Diana turned to go, Jimmie's long arm shot out through the bars and grasped her by the left wrist. The grip of his hand, which is now a contradiction in terms, was at the same time so sudden and so strong that Diana sensed at once that resistance would be futile.

In his usually inconsequential tones, McCloskey said, "Now, you do, don't try to pull away and don't make any quick movements. Try, if you know what I mean, to put fear out of your mind. He recognises fear at

once." Diana might be frightened, I suppose, but funnily enough,

For the next fifteen minutes McCloskey reasoned and pleaded with Jimmie to relax his grip, but all to no avail. "I'll have to try bribery," he said at length. Calling one of the servants who, wide-eyed, was watching the little drama, he sent for whiskey. Pouring out three glasses and mixing soda water with them, McCloskey offered the first to Diana urging her to take a sip. Next he poured one out for himself, leaving the third on the tray.

Jimmie adored whiskey, but now he professed complete indifference. When at length McCloskey offered him a glass, Jimmie stretched out his left hand. "No, Jimmie. It is more polite to drink with your right hand." Jimmie surveyed this member, looked at the glass and shook his head.

"I'm not frightened that he'll hurt me, Mac," said Diana after further minutes had dragged by, "but please do something. It's—it's, well, uncanny and I don't like it. Please, please, Jimmie," she went on, turning to the ape, "please let me go."

For reply, Jimmie executed a little jig, ending with an angry stamp of his foot. His grip tightened, as does that of a child when faced with being left alone.

"I shall have to leave you for about three minutes," said McCloskey in easy tones. "For God's sake keep your head and you'll be free almost at once."

Diana watched the doctor's retreating back uncomfortably, trying as she did so to keep a hold on herself and to

analyse her feelings. There was no fear, only a chill awareness of the strange, unutterable things going on in the ape's little mind. Jimmie meant no harm, Diana was sure. He made queer, gurgling sounds, which were an attempt at speech, or if not then, the fog of inarticulacy which lay between fear, it was in Jimmie. Fear of what? Diana asked herself wonderingly, the fear of a wild animal far removed from his own kind, striving against odds to climb the anthropological ladder a few steps, as to achieve some kind of community with those forbears had long escaped from the darkness?

The minutes of McCloskey's absence seemed an eternity. There swept over Diana a tide of embarrassment such as she had never known in her life, so that her mind became unable to grapple with the situation coherently. Then, and for the first time, embarrassment gave way to fear. Jimmie, who still had the quick instincts of the jungle, sensed that fear immediately. His grip tightened, almost painfully. There came into his eyes a look of reproach, as though to say: "Surely, you know that you have no need to fear *me*?"

McCloskey came sauntering down the pathway from the bungalow, careful not to show any urgency. Emptying a phial of colourless liquid into Jimmie's glass, he passed it through the bars, making no demur when the ape seized it greedily with his left hand.

Within twenty seconds from the time Jimmie drained the glass, his grip slackened. With a deep sigh that was almost a groan, he crumpled slowly and fell to the floor of his cage.

"I think," said Diana, "that I'm going to faint."

"You're going to do nothing of the kind," snapped McCloskey. "It's my privilege, because I knew the danger you were in and you didn't. By God, Diana, you have pluck. Not one person in a thousand would have kept as calm as you did. I salute you."

"Poor, poor Jimmie," said Diana tenderly. "He did so want to say something. Although I'm thankful it's over, I don't believe that I was in any danger . . . at any rate,

danger from physical hurt. I don't know whether you will understand, Mac, but in these last minutes I have been terribly afraid of something . . . hideous, unholy, something that I can't even think, Mac, that Jimmie *spoke*. It just happened, God, that it was a language I didn't understand. I suppose you think I'm overwrought and crazy, Mac, but I'm not."

"I don't think anything of the kind, Diana. I'm inclined to believe that you are right."

"Please have him taken back to the jungle, Mac. Give him his liberty. Forget all this . . . nonsense."

McCloskey shook his head.

"It's been a frightful ordeal for you, and I'm desperately sorry that I allowed it to happen, but you see, Diana, it's something more than that for me. At heart I'm a scientist, a student. This prescribing of tonics and quinine, patching up broken legs and all the rest of it, is merely a means of livelihood. Like everyone else, I have to eat. Jimmie is my chief preoccupation and through Jimmie I have hopes of unlocking a vast storehouse of untapped knowledge. I've made a psychological study of him and I can tell you now that the only difference between his mind and ours is one of degree. Much of what we do is prompted by instinct and rather more in Jimmie's case. But when he reasons, the processes of his reasoning are identical with ours. If I live long enough—and if he does—I don't put it beyond the bounds of possibility that I shall be able to teach him to speak. I have already invented a language which, adapted to the formation of his mouth, it is physically possible for him to speak . . ."

McCloskey stopped abruptly. "Forgive me riding my hobby horse. I think we both need a drink."

"Why, do you think," Diana asked, when they were seated in the garden at the front of the bungalow, "Jimmie behaved like that?"

"I'm not sure—and I doubt whether you will be flattered by the answer—but I think that he recognised in you

something primitive and elemental, something completely untouched by tens of thousands of years of civilisation, artifice, pretence and all the other things behind which we hide our true selves. This elemental spirit, which is not recognised by human beings, but they are conscious of it, because of the presence of something vital and animal in us, without knowing what it is. . . .”

“No, Mac,” said Diana thoughtfully, “I’m not. I’ve always considered myself—well, polished and civilised.”

“So you are—on the surface. So is a diamond, whose precise facets are no more than windows, arranged by the lapidary so that we can view the fires within. Human beings see the surface of you, but I suspect that Jimmie looked inside and saw things which we can no longer recognise, things to which we have deliberately blinded ourselves all down through the ages because we are embarrassed by our own origins. The howl of protest which went up when Darwin propounded his theory wasn’t, as people pretended it was, because if Darwin were right the fundamentalist belief in the biblical creation must be nonsensical. That was the excuse, the pretext. The true reason was that Darwin—whether right or wrong—said in plain language what human beings had been thinking and hoping wasn’t true, that they and the apes were branches of the same tree. It isn’t in us to see an ape and then not wonder how we came to be so much like them. We are rather like the educated children of uncouth and uneducated parents, ashamed of the common clay from which we sprang. Can’t you imagine, twenty million years ago, when Man and the Ape had only just reached the parting of the ways, how anxious Man was to deny his relationship? That, probably, was the beginning of snobbery—‘Now children, you may go out to play, but I want you to promise to keep out of the trees . . . no swinging from the boughs, or the neighbours will think we don’t know how to walk upright . . . and besides, your arms will grow long. Look at your father. *His* arms are so short that I have to scratch the small of his back for him . . .’

but, you see, your father's family left the trees four generations ago and your cousins never pick things up with their toes . . . it's not until the fruit is ripe and then it will fall off the tree."

With a bitter little laugh, "that makes me feel better," she said, "I'm not so sure that I've enjoyed the afternoon with you, Angus McCloskey. I ought to go now," she added, "but I'll stay a little longer, just to be a good neighbor. I wish you hadn't said all that," she added in a suddenly childlike voice, "because I've sometimes wondered about myself and such very odd things that I don't care to talk about them. Am I so very odd, Angus?"

Angus McCloskey had a strange look in his eyes as he replied in a soft, infinitely tender voice: "You're beautiful beyond words and you're brave too. God knows that's odd enough. Odder still, I suspect you of great loyalty. In fact," he added with a note of forced levity, "I think you should be stuffed and put in a glass case in the British Museum. Now go away and leave an old bachelor in peace. I have an appointment with Jimmie, who's going to wake up with a terrible headache, yelling for a drink."

McCloskey watched Diana until her lithe figure disappeared behind the trees. Covering his face with his hands, he remained motionless until a servant came to remind him that he was due at the hospital.

XI

It was nearly six weeks before Adrian Hornby was fit to leave the hospital. When the bandages were removed from his face, he had demanded a mirror. Reluctantly, Angus McCloskey permitted this, sitting beside the bed while the patient inspected himself for the first time. "You warned me to expect something pretty bad," said Hornby,

"but somehow"—he shuddered—"I didn't think it would be as bad as this."

"As I've told you repeatedly," replied McCloskey, "this is a job for a specialist. You owe it to yourself to get well and put yourself in the hands of a good doctor."

"That means being away from here at least a month," said Hornby bitterly. "What do you suppose would happen to the plantation in that time? As it is, the negroes have gone to pot already. . . ."

"On the contrary, Hornby, everything there is in the place is in pie order, as you will find when you get there."

"I don't believe it. I haven't anyone competent to take charge."

"Well, you may as well know it now as later," said McCloskey, "but two days after young Hudd left the hospital, although he was still a bit groggy, he took charge out there, dividing his time between your place and his own office. All things considered, I think it was pretty decent of him."

"All things considered," Hornby shouted, "he has his bloody nerve. He and I were on the point of winding up everything when all this happened and I had asked Hardinge & Boulton to take over from . . ."

"I know all about that, Hornby. But the fact is that Hardinge & Boulton hadn't taken over your agency and had no power to do anything. Hudd, even though you had quarrelled, was still your agent, and, as I have told you, he's behaved pretty decently. In his shoes I'd have told you to go to hell before I lifted a finger, which merely proves that Hudd is a better man than I am."

"Then you tell Hudd from me that I don't want to be beholden to him and I don't want him interfering in . . ."

"You do your own dirty work, Hornby. I'm your doctor, not your messenger boy, and as your doctor I'm telling you not to excite yourself without need. Now listen to me. I'm doing the talking. Your place can go to the devil for all I care, but my concern is to see that you are well again—well in body and mind."

"Sorry, Mac, but my gorge rises whenever I think of that . . ."

"She . . . knew about your gorge, my lad, and it'll rise again if you're not careful. I want you to know that you're never going to be the sort of face you act hastily. Now that face of yours, now, is a mess. In time the inflammation will go down, of course, but without proper surgical treatment it's never going to be the sort of face you'll want to be found. Left like that, it's not only going to be ugly, but it's going to do bad things to you, deep inside of you. It's going to poison your whole life. Do you understand? I know a little—only a little—of what goes on inside the human mind and I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't warn you. You're man enough, I think, to prefer straight talking. Forget your damned coconuts, for they're not worth considering alongside your own future happiness."

On this and subsequent visits, McCloskey had the uncomfortable feeling that he was wasting his time. Hornby's mind was closed to reason.

Immediately on leaving the hospital, Hornby wrote a curt letter to Hudd, instructing him to hand over everything forthwith to Hardinge & Boulton. In that way, which was just as well, it was not necessary for them to meet. The breach between them was too wide to be healed. So far as the life of the Fort was concerned, Hornby no longer existed. During the weeks after leaving hospital, he came twice after nightfall to see McCloskey. Neighbouring planters reported that they never saw him and that, on paying friendly calls, they had been rebuffed.

Most people forgot Adrian Hornby, for he had alienated their sympathies by his brutal assault upon John Hudd, and the story of his attack had lost nothing in the telling as it went the rounds. If he wanted to isolate himself from the rest of the community, it was his privilege. Doubtless, in his own good time, he would come to his senses and then, not without a certain conscious virtue, the community would be magnanimous enough to forgive him and receive him once more into the fold.

Surprisingly, the community forgave Diana, almost as quickly as it had condemned her. As Magee Kennedy remarked at a tea party, the poor girl could not have good looks and it was rather unjust to go to such lengths merely because a couple of impressionable young men had been infatuated with her. After all, it had to be admitted, it was only justice that there was no evidence that she had enticed them or given either to suppose that he had any right to do so. Although with a certain reluctance, Diana was invited to the court of public opinion in Fort Mallet, in which she received a shower of invitations. The only abstainers were Mrs Miller, whose reasons were probably obvious and the cause of some malicious laughter, and Mrs Gosling. The latter had been gratuitously offensive to Diana, and, it was generally believed, had deserved her subsequent discomfiture. The godly Mrs Gosling had never been distinguished for her charity towards human frailties and was both feared and detested. "It is almost impossible," the Resident once remarked, "to discuss anything with Mrs Gosling without being blasphemous and sacrilegious, because she makes it so plain that all her opinions are inspired directly by the Almighty. To disagree with her is to disagree with God, and that I am not prepared to do. In fact," he concluded, "I can endure life without Mrs Gosling with remarkable fortitude."

Reluctantly, and at her brother's insistence, a couple of weeks after John Hudd left the hospital, Diana invited him to dinner. She did not quite know which she dreaded the more, his acceptance or refusal. She had always liked him from the very first meeting. She liked his modesty, his quiet good manners, the steady purpose she read in his eyes. "If I were to have to pick a husband for a very dear friend," she told her brother, "I would pick John, because he is most of the things I like and admire in a man."

"But not for yourself, eh?" laughed Jack. "I understand, Di, and I don't want him here for your sake, but my own. Damn it, I like him."

Instead of being an ordeal, the evening when John Hudd

came to dinner passed pleasantly. Nobody else was invited. When their host arrived, Jack and Diana were playing records. Diana, one of the hits in the West End of London, and appealing music seemed to strike the imagination. The atmosphere at the dinner table was one of complete exiles divorced from personal matters, the roar of the surging theatre crowds, glistening wet pavements, the cries of newsboys, the honking of taxis and the remembrance of those precious moments before the curtain went up, when even the discordant sound of the orchestra and its instruments has a charm. Outside, as though to heighten the contrast, the velvety tropical night pulsated with its own noises, the bull-frogs vieing with the crickets, the threatening hum of mosquitoes kept at bay by fine-mesh copper screens, against which moths, attracted by the lights within, beat their wings vainly.

It was easier to talk of far-off things, for it lifted the pressure of near and urgent things and problems and was better than talking of Adrian Hornby and how he was to climb back to normal living. Diana found the evening easier than she had hoped, and without seeming to do so, set the pattern of her future relationship with John Hudd. Subtly, she made it apparent that he was present as her brother's guest and that she, for that reason, was a charming and attentive hostess.

Of the three of them only Jack Maynard thought the evening an unqualified success, and he because his sensibilities were not acute enough to perceive the unsaid things which hovered among them. John Hudd was able, only by exercising great self-control, to maintain the façade of easy camaraderie. Never, it seemed to him, had Diana been more desirable, and what made it so hard to bear was that never had she seemed so remote and unattainable, so cool and untouched by the fever which was coursing through his veins.

When John Hudd had gone back to the uninspiring quarters he occupied in the Mess, Jack Maynard remarked: "If John was sweet on you, Di, I think he's got over it. I'm glad—for his sake."

"I'm glad too, Jack," replied Diana, marvelling at her brother's obtuseness and changing the subject. "Let's take a stroll before turning in."

Arm in arm they walked along the verandah, catching glimpses of the quiet lives of their neighbours. Mr. Miller, the Government Botanist, working under a lamp, mounting specimens in a case, while Mrs. Miller sat beside him, away, her knitting needles flashing as she laboured on the sweater she was making for her husband to use on his home leave. Mr. Miller could be seen in motionless repose on the verandah, while his wife sat inside at a table, writing letters at a furious speed upon sheets of mauve paper. The Residency was brightly lit. From the drawing-room, came the sound of Maggie's crisp, masculine touch as she soothed herself at her concert grand piano. She was evidently in a chaotic mood, for while Jack and Diana were within earshot she switched from *Abide with me* to the *Chocolate Soldier* and thence from *Stop your tickling Jack* to the *Moonlight Sonata*.

From the Mess came the sound of an altercation. The loud, raucous voice of a drunken man and harsh laughter struck a false note, altogether out of harmony with the primness of The Green. Lights were on in the hospital. Then the lights of the operating theatre were switched on. A group of white-clad figures in the centre of the room told of a midnight battle for a human life, the oldest drama of all.

The day had been a hot one and the cool of the evening late in coming. Now, with a gentle breeze blowing in from the sea, nobody seemed to want to go to bed. There were lights in every house.

Diana had had a letter from a school friend that morning. The friend, Molly Hammond, recently married to a Singapore rubber broker, invited Diana to go over to spend a week or two with them. "I'd like to go when you're away on patrol, Jack," Diana told her brother. "It would be pretty dull for me alone in the bungalow...."

"I'm quite sure Maggie would insist upon you staying at the Residency," said Jack, "so don't let that worry you."

"She might feel bound to insist, Jack, and I wouldn't like that. Besides, it isn't much fun being there, kind as they are. It's a heavy place, rather heavy going, and you may be away for six weeks. Maggie, as you call her, isn't very good company about me. Why should she be anyway? You'll be about six weeks away on patrol and the dates of the mail boat are just right."

Diana was now anxious for the months to pass. She felt that Mallet had nothing more to give her and was weary of wasting the precious days and weeks. A few more months in New Zealand and then home. Her mother, she knew, would press her to stay in New Zealand, but Diana was resolved to return to England. She had a little money of her own, the legacy of an aunt, and with this she was prepared to face the world.

The morning had also brought a letter from Jules Duvier, reminding Diana of her lightly-made promise. She laughed grimly as she recalled it, for it was not a difficult one to keep. The young Frenchman, she suspected, made declarations of undying love to every attractive woman he met, but so long as they were not taken too seriously, no harm was done. Diana recalled him with pleasure. She liked him. He was gay, amusing, tolerant, good to look at, charming and, in fact, possessed most of the qualities which appealed to women.

Diana did not mention the Frenchman's letter to her brother, for she believed that Jack would disapprove. Nevertheless, before she went to sleep that night she had read it again several times.

The lights went out in the hospital operating-room. "I'm ready for bed if you are, Di," said Jack Maynard, breaking a long silence.

As they passed the gate of McCloskey's house, the doctor himself arrived from the hospital. "Come in and have a nightcap with me," he invited them in a tired voice.

"We're both tired, Mac," replied Diana, "and so are you. Ask us another night, won't you?"

Suddenly, from the other side of the bungalow, came a

hideous howling which shattered the peace of the evening, followed by a deafening metallic sound as might come from a boiler factory. "I believe," said Diana, "that that damned ape. He's a dangerous brute."

Partly because he would have been worried, and partly because of a disinclination to talk about her experience, Diana told her brother of her ordeal some weeks previously on several occasions since, at McCloskey's urging, she had made visits to Jimmie, taking care not to approach the cage closely. On these visits Jimmie had evinced great interest, and, upon seeing her, had immediately donned the straw hat which he had stolen.

"Come on in and say good-night to Jimmie," called McCloskey, "because, if he keeps this up, nobody's going to get any sleep tonight."

Wishing there were some way out of it, Diana towed the reluctant Jack into the doctor's entrance. The noise as they approached was indescribable. Jimmie's howls and savage snarls sent cold shivers down Diana's back. They were the primæval sounds of the jungle, the sounds that must have echoed down the ages at a time when there were no men to hear them. Beside them the rattling of the iron bars was almost musical.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Diana. "Sing him a lullaby?"

"A good idea!" McCloskey agreed. "Jack and I will wait here. It will be interesting to hear what happens."

"Would you like me, perhaps, to go into the cage and tuck him up?" asked Diana with a facetiousness which she did not feel and which she only assumed for her brother's benefit. Taking the electric flash lamp which McCloskey handed to her, Diana followed the pathway to the cage. As she approached she turned the flashlight on herself, so that she stood, clearly visible to the frenzied ape. The uproar ceased instantly. "Why are you making such a shocking noise, Jimmie?" she asked.

Struggling to pierce a way through the fog of his inarticulacy, Jimmie's reply took the form of little gurgling

cries such as a mother cat uses to call her kittens. The flash-light revealed him crouched in the front of the cage, his arms folded across his bare breast, and a rapt expression on his hideous face. He was blind, but there was the sight of the eyes, which were like those of a spaniel, with the light of intelligence in them. In which she hoped would not be audible to her and McCloskey, Diana began to sing softly: "Hushaby on the tree top, when the wind blows the cradle"

From Jimmie came from Jimmie a groan of anguish, filled with longings and an infinite melancholy. His cavernous chest acted like a sounding board, or the belly of a 'cello, so that the groan took on the quality of a lament. For a few seconds Jimmie faced the bright light without flinching. Then his hands relaxed their grip upon the bars and he walked slowly into his little house.

As the grotesqueness of it all burst upon Diana, she did not know whether she wanted to laugh or cry.

"Strange, strange," observed McCloskey when Diana rejoined them. "Jimmie heard your voice and that's what made him start that racket. I wish I could understand what it is that gives you such a profound influence on him. We must try some experiments."

"I think you'll have to try them without me, Mac," said Diana soberly, drinking eagerly from the whiskey-and-soda which had been put into her hand. "There's something beastly, something—unholy about it all. There are things best not known, Mac, and I have a horrible idea that you are on the verge of discovering them."

"Like all women," remarked McCloskey airily, "you lack the scientific approach to problems. You reduce everything to the personal. You must try not to be petty. In that ape's head, deeply buried, are secrets which may well spell happiness for millions of unhappy people, now and in the future. Modern psychology is up against the fact that your psyche and mine are too deeply buried beneath prejudice, convention, muddled thinking, old wives' tales and superstition."

The material isn't raw enough, do you see, whereas Jimmie's psyche is untouched by our complications. It's all more primitive, nearer the surface and closer to origins. It's a fair analogy to say that to unlock the secrets of Jimmie's mind, all one has to do is to pull the simple bolt. To unlock the secrets of your mind, the comparison, is to tackle the time lock on a bank vault.

"You tempt me, Mac," said Diana, getting up. "but I'm afraid you'll have to find another girl. Maybe Jimmie is a blood relation of mine, but I don't want to know and I don't intend to claim him."

"All I know," said the prosaic Jack, "is that if your precious Jimmie kicks up that racket again, the Resident is going to send me down here with a gun."

"How in God's name," asked McCloskey, turning to Diana, "did you—you of all people—pick a policeman for a brother? Was it the uniform?"

XII

THE Reverend Henry Gosling was a tall, ugly man with a too prominent Adam's apple who always looked as though he were wearing someone else's cast-off clothing, cast off none too soon. His ugliness was redeemed by kindly, twinkling blue eyes and a deep voice so gentle that there was a caress in it. Had worldly ambition been his mainspring, his voice alone would have assured him the breeches and gaiters of a bishop, in which he would have looked even more grotesque than he did in shapeless white ducks. Sartorially speaking, he was an offence.

There was a tendency to regard Henry Gosling as a weak and ineffective man, largely because he gave the appearance of being ruled by his wife. The truth was, however, otherwise. Henry Gosling gave way to his wife in all non-essential matters and, since non-essential matters are always

mote numerous and frequently more obvious than the essential, and since he did not care greatly what others might think, the people continued to regard him as a man

of the world. The chief bone of contention in the Gosling household had been Henry Gosling's admiration for and close friendship with the Reverend Father Courtenay of the Malacca Mission. In Mrs Gosling's lexicon of abuse there was no stronger adjective than "jesuitical", despite the fact that her knowledge of the Jesuit Order was so slender as to be almost non-existent. Disliking Jesuits in general, she abominated Father Courtenay in particular. His habit of drinking a glass of claret with his dinner was "wine-bibbing". His long hours spent in a chemical laboratory attached to the Mission were "witchcraft", while his deep understanding of Malay folklore and superstitions, on which he was generally conceded to be the world authority, was characterised as "encouraging the heathen in their evil ways." In brief, Father Courtenay could do nothing which did not call forth Mrs Gosling's disapproving eloquence.

Like so many of his Order, Father Courtenay, was a man of brilliant attainments in several fields. Primarily, he was a meteorologist, one of that band of Jesuits, who, from their observatory at Siccawei, outside Shanghai, had created and perfected the typhoon warning service on the China Coast, thus saving uncounted lives. As an astronomer, he had several discoveries to his credit and in the field of pure mathematics had achieved world recognition. In his early sixties, he was a striking-looking man. With his black hair and carefully tended beard, neither of which showed a trace of grey, he had a certain magnificence. His wide forehead and beautifully arched brows, no less than the noble shape and carriage of his head, lent him a distinction which was at times almost overpowering.

Fort Mallet was by way of being an intellectual cemetery. Hugh Kennedy, like most successful British administrators, found honest mediocrity a better tool than genius. Being mediocre himself, he understood mediocrity. He preferred

the dogged plodders to those who attained their goals by brilliance. The commercial members of the community were too busy making money to concern themselves with abstractions. It was, therefore, that Father Courtenay found himself in company with other good brains around the perimeter of those of Mr Gosling and Dr McCloskey. The former was a Protestant and the latter an agnostic who, in Courtenay's eyes, an advantage rather than other co-religionists were too often meek and pliable in presence. His flint needed steel.

It was McCloskey who introduced Diana to Father Courtenay. The latter came into the Club at the end of a sultry day, sending one of the Club servants up to the Residency with a warning that a severe circular storm was on its way down from the China Sea and might be expected in the vicinity of Fort Mallet before midnight. This done, he took the empty chair beside Diana and the doctor. A few moments later they were joined by Mr Gosling, to whom Diana was unknown.

"I perceive," said Father Courtenay, addressing Mr Gosling, "that we are consorting with the heathen. Miss Maynard, it would seem, is neither of your flock, nor of mine. A challenge, my friend! One of us must snatch this brand from the burning."

"I think, Father," said Diana with becoming modesty, "yours is the prior right because, you see, I was brought up as a Catholic and—well, it didn't take."

"Worse and worse, my child! For those brought up in the darkness there is some excuse, but for those brought up in the Light there is none." Father Courtenay turned on Diana with a look of mock ferocity, but his penetrating eyes were disconcerting.

"Watch out, Diana," said McCloskey. "There's a nasty look in his eye that says 'Believe or Burn.' In case you don't know it, you are in the presence of a very artful man."

When during the conversation which followed it emerged that Diana had been to a famous convent school in south-east

London, Father Courtenay's eyes glinted with interest. "This is a strange coincidence," he said, "for your Mother Superior is younger than my own good sister, whom I have known for more than forty years. I shall write to her at once by mail to acquaint her with her failure."

"I may too much, Father," begged Diana. "I still love her and I write to her every few days—I haven't told her—everything and I don't hurt her feelings. She was always so good and

"I can tell her yourself, child, and I will write to her by the following mail. Beyond that, I make no promises."

With some skill Mr Gosling steered the conversation into meteorological channels. Once astride his hobby horse, Father Courtenay fascinated his three hearers as his gentle, well-modulated voice told the story of the long battle, with Siccawei as its general headquarters, to understand the vagaries of the circular storms which, sweeping up and across the China Sea without warning, had been the terror of fishermen and sailors for centuries. He told of wind so tremendous that it became a monstrous battering-ram, demolishing stoutly-built houses, driving the sea miles inland, lifting big ships and leaving them on dry land. He told of thousands of men, women and children whose lungs had burst under the pressure of wind which had forced open their lips, of a flying straw severing the jugular vein of a colleague and of men whipped out of the rigging of sailing ships to be lost in the smother of a raging sea.

"Our first, and longest, task was to find the cauldron which brewed these storms and then to create a pattern, something predictable, from what seemed a wild and aimless fury. . . . It was the invention of wireless telegraphy which finally brought us victory. Land stations and ships at sea sent us hour-by-hour reports, so that we were able to chart not only the whereabouts, but the speed and direction of a typhoon. Wireless, in turn, enabled us to warn ships at sea, tell them what course to take, so that instead of riding blindly into the vortex, they could skirt the danger area. . . .

Early in the fight we learned that the breeding ground of the typhoon was a comparatively small area between the Philippines, Formosa and the mainland of China, and when an enemy is predictable, his watch is easier to keep.

"And tonight, Father? Will tonight's storm be as bad as you have described?" asked Diana, uttering a small sigh of relief.

"It will be bad enough, but not to be compared with the storms which scream up the China Sea towards the mainland. We are too far south. But it will be bad enough, bad enough to be dangerous. God help the fishermen who do not get back."

Time had passed so quickly to Father Courtenay's husband that they had been unconscious of its passage. They were brought back to more mundane things by the arrival in the Club of Mrs Gosling, who had come to find her husband. Seeing him in the company of the three persons on whom the weight of her disapproval had fallen most heavily, she glared from the other side of the lounge rather than approach. Dinner would, of course, be spoiled. That would be Henry's just punishment for consorting with such people, and as she herself cared little what she ate, dinner might spoil.

An angry woman does not rely upon the voice to make her presence known. Somehow, in a way none of the four at the table could describe, the conversation withered and died like a delicate plant exposed to the rigours of a cold wind. Henry Gosling, used to the phenomenon, rose from the table with murmured excuses and was soon lost in the darkness of The Green as he walked home with his wife.

"I wonder," exclaimed McCloskey after a brief silence, "what poor Gosling has done to deserve her."

"You view her through muddy eyes, my friend," said Father Courtenay. "Underneath that unattractive exterior—deeply buried, I grant you—lies a good woman, a loyal friend and wife, who would cheerfully die for our good friend Gosling. What more can you ask of any woman? Virtue and grace, too? You ask too much. A blight was cast over Christendom long before the good Mrs Gosling

was born, when the word went forth from Geneva that God did not like his children to be happy, nor to wear the outward tokens of happiness. To a woman like that it must be a torture to see her husband in the corrupting priest who, she is firmly convinced, celebrates Mass in private, and a doctor who is a professed

"I said," said Diana, "that Mrs Gosling isn't very nice about me either."

"I am not sure that I am, since you raise the question, Diana. Either you, or my good sister, must be at fault. I shall make it my business to find out which. Tell me, have you found contentment of mind by forsaking your Church? If you have, then I have nothing more to say."

"Do you mean do I know that I was right, Father?" asked Diana in a small voice. "No, I don't. But I am happier than I was, because I no longer have to tell lies to God and pretend that I believe things which I don't even understand."

Father Courtenay fixed Diana in the gaze of a pair of candid brown eyes which seemed to see everything. "If, my child," he said gently and slowly, "what you have just said sprang from your innermost heart and was not merely the product of a quick brain and a glib tongue—and I am not sure which it was—then I do not believe that God will be so very angry with you. God, as I see Him, prefers fearless honesty to humble deceit. That is why I believe that God tolerates such an unbeliever as Dr McCloskey here," he continued in lighter vein, sensing that the atmosphere was becoming too tense for a social Club, "for the good doctor, I am persuaded, is honest in his unbelief. It is a pity, nevertheless, for if there were a place in his heart for God, I doubt whether he would waste his time trying to wrest the secrets of the Infinite from an ape."

"I did not know, Father," said Diana, wide-eyed with wonderment, "that a priest could be so—broad-minded."

"Many of my calling are broad-minded, but none so broad-minded as God. Never forget that. It is strange, child,

that you should be a link between my sister and me. Perhaps it is a part of the pattern. Come and talk to me one day, out of the hearing of this infidel. I am not an infidel, but a student of storms. I detect in you a giddy spirit, aimlessly in the vortex of a storm, like other people who are created out of a change in temperature. You are a typhoon, Sea, destined to whirl north in a giddy spirit of destruction as they go."

"I am not a very stormy person, Father. I think, in fact, contrary, I am rather tranquil."

"The typhoon at its centre has always a patch of calm. It is on the fringes that the storm is worst . . . and the danger is for those who are sucked into the vortex. A candle will burn without a flicker at the centre, so do not count 'too much on this tranquillity of yours.'

The storm centre had shifted to the Protestant Mission.

"To see you sitting there with that black-bearded Jesuit and a drunken doctor was bad enough," Mrs Gosling was saying, "but I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw that shameless Maynard girl with you. There are plenty of nice people here, so why must you associate with—the dregs?"

"It is a pity, my dear," observed Mr Gosling with a deceptive mildness, "that you allow prejudice to blind you to reason. If you will not associate with people, you cannot know them. Equally, if you do not know them, you have no right to pass harsh judgments on them. Father Courtenay is a very brilliant man. I would like to think that when my time comes I shall have left behind me the monument of good work and world-wide recognition which are his today. Furthermore, he is my very good friend. Dr McCloskey is a good man and a competent doctor. That he drinks too much should inspire your pity, not your condemnation. He, too, is a good and loyal friend."

"I shall be interested to hear your defence of the Maynard girl, Henry, despite the fact that you yourself heard her insult me publicly."

Henry Gosling had not intended to mention Diana's

name, knowing that to do so would inflame his wife, but the latter's cold strictures had aroused his ire. "I fear that Miss May is a little dim in your eyes, my dear," he replied, with a faint smile of malice, "is that she happens to be a little dim, and a peaceful young woman. That you cannot for-

"I suppose now that you will deny that she insulted a woman old enough to be her mother and then

"my dear, I do not deny it. She should not have been outside to you. She should have remembered the disparity in years between you. But how much more should you—old enough to be her mother, as you have rightly said—have refrained from offering the girl a gratuitous insult in public. To quote your own overworked maxim, two blacks do not make a white, my dear. . . .

"There are not many points of disagreement between us," continued Henry Gosling, thrusting home his advantage, "but it is evident that we do not like the same people. Our tastes differ, which is our privilege. Do me the kindness, therefore, not to refer to my friends as 'the dregs' and I in turn will try—and it will not be easy, I assure you—to forget that you choose for your boon companions women I regard privately as viperish and uncharitable morons. Let us, in brief, exercise mutual forbearance, my dear."

Henry Gosling looked across the table at his wife, whose bosom heaved under the stress of violent emotion. White with rage, she fumbled vainly with words, biting her lip as she realised her defeat. She was about to take refuge in tears when her husband's calm voice continued: "You have a wonderfully light hand with an omelet, my dear. I don't know when I have enjoyed one so much."

XIII

"You're a bit moody this evening, aren't you?" said Maynard, who had been watching his sister, Diana, unable to settle down to anything.

"Sorry, Jack. I feel restless, that's all. Perhaps it's the leaden heat that's got me down."

"Nothing wrong, is there, Di?" he asked.
"Maybe just the weather. Well, the storm that Father Courtenay promises us will soon clear it up. You'd talk me into it, wouldn't you, if there was anything seriously wrong? Even if I couldn't do much it's always a relief to get things off one's chest. Father Courtenay trying to get you back into the fold?"

"Not exactly, Jack, but I expect he'd like to. He has a funny way of saying things. He makes me feel impertinent, a bit cheap and small. But I like him. He's kind. No, there isn't anything wrong, Jack. I think I'd tell you. Everything's wrong, but nothing in particular. I've had the feeling all day that I'm going up a moving stairway when the stairway is coming down, and that I'm getting nowhere. Do you know the feeling? But don't worry, Jack. I'm making an awful fuss about nothing. It's a mood and it will pass."

Jack Maynard sighed with relief and then, because there did not seem anything more to say, resumed his reading. In a little while, pleading an early start the next morning, he went to bed, leaving his sister to her thoughts.

At a little after ten o'clock a deathly stillness crept like a blanket over the earth, silencing even the nocturnal creatures whose cries and songs are an ever present *obbligato* to life in the tropics. Even thought became difficult in the oppressive silence. Verifying that the servants had closed the storm shutters before leaving, Diana went out into the breathless night.

From out at sea came the sound of creaking oars as becalmed fishermen sought frantically to reach safety before the storm broke. It needed no skilled meteorologist to

tell the world that the sullen glassy sea would soon be lashed to fury.

She was breathless that the effort of walking to the Residency was almost too much. Still when she reached what was euphoniously called the *veranda*, a pleasant enough spot where, in a sheltered corner, seats had been provided, commanding a view of the sea, there she sat down, waiting tensely for the storm to break. The lights were out at the Club where, as a prelude to the storm, the storm shutters had been put up. In the whole of the little *casquette* scarcely a light was visible and to Diana it seemed that she alone felt a call to witness the clash of the elements. Perhaps there was, she mused, as Angus McCloskey had said, something elemental about her, for instead of fearing the fury to come, she was looking forward to it. As a child she had loved storms. Few pleasures had been so great as that of battling on a cliff top with the south-westerly gales which swept up the English Channel, plucking at the grass roots, filling the world with sound and fury.

Diana was steeped in the island tradition that one must not hurl challenges at the elements. Ships which were given boastful, bombastic names, *Indestructible*, and the like, had a way of coming to grief. The *Titanic* had been loudly acclaimed as unsinkable. The elements were the friends of those who accorded to them proper respect. Diana, waiting for what was to come, felt in some curious way that her lonely vigil was an act of worship, and because her attitude was respectful, she felt no fear.

It was a pitch-black, moonless night. Even the stars were hidden by a faint sea haze. The light from a match, struck some twenty yards away, briefly illumined the tree trunks, casting inky pools of shadow upon the ground. Diana wondered who it was beside herself who found the night too oppressive for sleep. The match sputtered out and she decided to remain silent, hoping that whoever it was would pass on and leave her alone. It was quite likely to be the Resident, but she was in no mood for his heavy gallantry. By ill luck the newcomer chose a spot only a few feet

away from Diana to re-light his pipe and the dancing flame revealed him as Albert Miller, to whom she had hardly spoken since they were first introduced. She had not minded in her mind as the unfortunate husband of Mrs. Maynard had not avoided him, but Miller was often seen at home and was seldom allowed to leave his wife.

"Good evening, Miss Maynard. I hope I haven't disturbed you. Like you, I expect, I couldn't sleep. Isn't the weather heavy?"

"Yes, it's very oppressive," Diana agreed.

Miller sat down timidly at the far end of the bench which Diana occupied. He was a commonplace little man, with rather chubby cheeks, a turned-up nose and a passion for the obvious. He had never been known to pass the Club barometer without tapping it and making some fatuous meteorological observation, to which nobody listened. Without a drink to give him courage, he had a habit of speaking in shy, confidential whispers. The second drink made him friendly and gregarious. His voice assumed normal tones and he showed a disposition to become the life of the party. Then, just as he was about to have his third, Mrs. Miller would seize him firmly by the arm and, casting one of her toothy smiles in all directions, she would lead him home. His parting remark was always: "Good night, one and all!"

It was several minutes before Miller could bring himself to speak. "You know, Miss Maynard," he began at length, "I'm glad I found you here this evening. I've often wanted to talk to you, but somehow—well, there doesn't seem to have been any opportunity. You're different, you see. I expect everyone tells you that, but it's true. I'm very ordinary myself, so I expect that is why I admire you so much. You walk and hold yourself so wonderfully and you seem so—so sure. I wish I was like that. I'm never sure of anything—much."

"You mustn't talk like that, Mr. Miller, or you'll make me vain. Besides," Diana added pointedly, "I am sure Mrs. Miller would not like it."

"I wonder, Miss Maynard, whether you would do me the great honour of accepting a small gift. It's nothing, really. I'm always away on the job, time hangs heavily in the evenings, I often sit in camp in the evenings by carving. I have carved this for you from a piece of aromatic wood. Smell it, and . . ."

From his pocket Miller produced a wooden bracelet. It was a beautiful thing, carved from some lustrous wood, a light cream colour. The surface was so well polished that it reflected like ivory. By the light of a match Diana saw that the quality of the carving was exquisite.

So, Diana reflected, Miller's arrival had not been quite the accident that it appeared to be. He must have seen her and followed. It was an impossible situation, but even as she realised this, she wanted to end it without hurting the little man's feelings.

"It's very kind of you, Mr Miller, but you must see that I can't accept this from you. You should give this to your wife. I'm sure she would love it, especially as it was made with your own hands."

Diana handed back the bracelet. In silence Miller put it in his pocket and shortly afterwards Diana was appalled to hear a deep sob, which she professed not to notice. He then took the bracelet from his pocket, surveying it carefully in the light of a match and when this guttered out, there came the sound of splintering wood as he crushed the bracelet under his heel.

"I suppose," said Miller in a broken voice, "that I'm beneath your notice. That's it, isn't it? I should've known it. Your kind and my kind don't mix. But I want you to know that I wasn't being presumptuous. I wasn't going to force myself on you, or do anything foolish. I respect you too much for that. But I wanted, more than anything else in the world, to know that you were wearing that bracelet. It was made for *you* and for nobody else. Now it's smashed to bits and nobody's going to wear it. Smashed to bits . . . like my life. I used to think my wife was wonderful—nobody like her—but I'll tell you something I've never told to a

living soul. My wife is a bad, evil woman. Whenever I go away, she's unfaithful to me. I've known her for a long time. . . . Smashed to bits, that's me."

Albert Miller rose to his feet, drawing himself to his full height. Then, with a new-found dignity, he turned his back and disappeared in the darkness.

The storm broke a few minutes later. The stillness gave way to a symphony of terrifying, hellish noise. The roar of the wind went up the scale to the point where the shrillness was beyond the capacity of the human ear. Waves, flecked with phosphorescent foam, licked up the base of the cliff like tongues of flame. The bough of a tree above Diana's head snapped like a carrot and was carried away. Soaked to the skin, blinded with spray and battered by the wind, Diana held on to the massive iron bench which tilted twice. Strangely, she had no fear. Instead, she experienced a wild excitement and exultation. Her sluggish brain had suddenly become clear. This was life. What was the famous line? 'One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without an age without a name.' That was it. That was the philosophy of the sane. The drab, incomplete life around The Green at Fort Mallet now took on its true perspective. It was too prim and confining. Those who dwelled there were beginning to die before they had lived. "I want to live . . . to live . . . to live!" Diana hurled her words into the teeth of the shrieking gale.

Almost as suddenly as it had come, the storm passed on, leaving a refreshed calm behind it. It was as though the atmosphere had been washed clean, drained of all its impurities. In this new and splendid world Diana felt gay, light-hearted and full of life, an experience strange to her since coming to Fort Mallet.

It was long after midnight before Diana sought her bed, to sleep like a tired child and rise with the dawn. Jack was called away early, before he had time to eat breakfast. Diana waited for him. When he returned it was to announce that Albert Miller's battered body had been washed up on to the beach in front of the Customs House.

"How terrible for Mrs Miller!" was Diana's only comment.

He had been away for a late stroll before the storm came on, according to Mrs Miller he was dead, and there will have to be an inquest, I suppose."

Diana, not quite knowing why, went up to the veranda where she had sat through the storm, and from the grass retrieved the pieces of the wooden bracelet. They had broken cleanly, and the pieces were easy to find.

Her brother came home in the evening to find Diana engrossed in glueing the pieces together. "Where did you get that?" he asked. "I've never seen it before."

"It was given me by a man who died. I think it would please him if I wore it sometimes."

XIV

THE evening before Diana was due to sail for Singapore, she was given a farewell party at the Club. Nobody knew who initiated the idea and, equally, nobody cared. It was one of those parties which seemed to materialise out of nothing and which are, more often than not, far more successful than those which are carefully planned. It was the pleasant custom to greet the newcomer and to speed those who were going home on leave by giving a party at the Club, which was Fort Mallet's way of saying how-do-you-do? and goodbye.

Hugh Kennedy chose these occasions to make long, rambling speeches, but on this one was deterred by his wife. "The girl's only been here a month or two and she's only going to be away a few weeks, Hugh. A speech isn't called for. Wait until she goes for good and let her leave with your oratory ringing in her ears."

On the day before the party, much to Diana's dismay, Mrs Miller announced that she was taking the same ship to

Singapore, so at the last moment the celebrations took on the nature of a farewell to the latter. It had been planned to begin the party with a dance, but with the other's recent bereavement, this seemed somewhat inappropriate. The task fell to Maggie Kennedy of consulting with Mrs Miller and ascertaining her wishes in the matter. Much to Maggie's amazement, although barely a month had elapsed since the tragic death of Albert Miller, Mrs Miller plumped for a dance. "You see," she explained with a brave smile, "there's nothing like a dance to cheer one up. And if you're happy, there isn't any reason why others should be too."

"But we *are* unhappy, my dear, and we all feel the loss of your husband deeply. You must understand that before you decided to leave us so soon, we were going to give the party for Miss Maynard, but as soon as she heard you were going, Miss Maynard insisted that it be given for you. It's for you, therefore, to decide."

"I'm sure I wouldn't want to spoil Miss Maynard's fun," was the reply to this, given with uncompromising sweetness. "Besides, I think I would like to dance once more where Albert and I danced so often together and were so wonderfully happy. I think he would want me to."

Mrs Miller thereupon went to her wardrobe, from which she produced a very frilly gown of pale-blue muslin, printed with a shrieking design of bilious orchids. "Do you think," she asked, "that if this is dyed black it will be suitable? Albert always loved me in it. He said," she added archly, "that it made me look like the Queen of the May. Look," she continued, pointing to where the lace fringe was badly torn, "that's where Albert put his foot the last time I wore it."

"Yes, that is a good idea. Have it dyed . . ."

Maggie Kennedy, a perplexed frown on her face, left as hurriedly as decency would permit, trying as she went to see things through the eyes of Mrs Miller. After some thought Maggie decided that if she were in the other's shoes, either her grief would be so crushing that dancing at a farewell party would be unthinkable, or alternatively, that having decided to dance, she would not do so in mourning.

There had been many farewell parties given at the Club but this, Muggie decided, was going to be the most difficult of them all. Still, in mind that Mrs Miller and Dr. Miller were joint hosts, the party was being given, managing to get along with each other.

she decided, was becoming more complicated. There was an uncomfortable awareness that people and things were slipping from her control. Perhaps, she mused, she herself was growing older. That might be the explanation of some part of it, but it seemed to her that to believe that would be to over-simplify something she did not understand. The placid surface of Fort Mallet was ruffled: so was Maggie Kennedy. These days she harboured strange, fanciful thoughts, which made her vaguely uncomfortable. The changes in Fort Mallet seemed to date from the arrival of Diana Maynard. It might, of course, be pure coincidence. Reason told her that this was so, but instinct, or what people called intuition, told her that reason was not much help. Hitherto, it had pleased her to think of Fort Mallet as a kind of marionette show with Maggie Kennedy in command of the strings. It was not so much, she believed, that she had been a dictator, forcing the marionettes to do her bidding, but that it had always been so easy to predict what each would do when the string was pulled. Now, it was evident, nothing and nobody was predictable. It was all terribly vague in Maggie's mind, but a pattern seemed to be forming. She would be glad when Diana was gone. Secretly, she hoped she would never return. Soon, perhaps, life would return to normal.

A LITTLE black and white mongrel bitch looked into Adrian Hornby's eyes. Behind her adoring, mute wonderment and the kind of hurt known only to those—man and beast—who can love with a heart overflowing and with no room for anything but love. Something had happened and Penny, which was short for Penelope, did not understand what it was. Life hitherto had been such wonderful fun. There had been long scampers through the coconut groves and when she was too tired there had always been a ride home on the horse's back, balanced precariously behind her master. Only that very morning Penny had followed her master out to the most distant part of the plantation. She had arrived almost exhausted, only to receive a kick when she sought to demonstrate the love which refused to be stilled. It had not been a kick really, but it had been very near it, and the movement of the master's foot had been accompanied by snarling abuse in tones more hurtful than any kick. It had not been possible to keep up with the horse on the return journey. To make matters worse, a thorn had driven into the pad of her forefoot. She had arrived back, limping, tired and miserable. Even before she had gone to quench a raging thirst, Penny had come to her master to let him know that he was more important than the drink of cool water she craved.

"God damn you," Hornby shouted, hurling a book at Penny, "don't stare at me like that. I don't want your pity."

Penny slunk away miserably. Something had happened, something terrible, but it was beyond her power to understand. Her trusting eyes saw her master unchanged. His outline was the same, his smell was the same and, very rarely, his voice was the same. Even if she had been able to see the hideous, livid scar which distorted his face into something which made children scream and run away with fright, it would have made no difference, because when a

little mongrel bitch gives her love to a man, the giving is in itself a sufficient reward. Only an excessively foolish man would expect his love to be reciprocated in its entirety. Penny was not demanding. A day that began with a single caress and a word was enough. A caress and to be told that she was a stupid little thing would make her deliriously happy. She was able to be allowed to sleep, stretched out on the long chair, occasionally opening ecstatic eyes to assure herself that it was not a dream, was nothing less than paradise. But delights such as these belonged to the past. Penny had become expert at dodging things which were thrown at her, but that they usually missed her did not make the hurt less.

When Penny had slunk away to a pool of shade to shelter from the hot afternoon sunshine, Adrian Hornby looked hungrily at the whiskey bottle on the table beside him. Whiskey solved no problems, but it had the power to give them a semblance of solution. Probably ether and chloroform didn't destroy pain, but enabled one to forget it. Whiskey, too, was an anaesthetic. It put up a barrier between a man and a world which had become insufferable, enabling him to live suspended in a void of unreality.

It was funny, Hornby reflected, to feel cold on such a hot day. He was cold inside where the sun could not penetrate. Whiskey soon fixed that. The gurgling of the raw spirit as he poured three fingers into a glass was voluptuous. The rite of adding a little tepid water was no more than a concession to the convention which pinned the label 'drunkard' on the man who took his whiskey neat and enabled the man who added a token quantity of water to keep his illusions a little longer.

Cold sober, Adrian Hornby hated Diana Maynard in a way which was beyond him to define. One or two drinks helped him to see her in another light. His mind-picture of her, instead of being like a coolly beautiful statue of chaste white marble, took on the warm tints which she had in life. With a few more drinks to help, the picture would become clearer, acquiring that subtle aura of warmth which

Diana radiated and which made her so maddeningly desirable.

That was what Hornby could not understand. Despite her beauty, which was beyond question, there was no better way of describing her than as a virgin. It was that warmth, coupled with her seeming untrictible chastity, which set the blood madly racing. Diana was both virginal and wanton, which was a curious surdity. She talked to men as though she were their mother, cool, friendly, charming, gay and utterly unaware of what she did to their senses.

The raw spirit made Hornby feel better. It spread inside him, taking its warmth with it until the sensation was as though all his internal organs were bathed in some healing balm. Something had happened deep down inside him, Hornby decided. Sober, he felt drunk, and it was not until half drunk that he felt sober, master of himself and capable of ordinary thinking. He was like a haunted house. Its rooms and corridors were redolent of Diana. She was always there, but always in the *next* room, or lurking at the farther end of a corridor, out of reach and elusive, wearing a smile of invitation which in a flash could turn to mockery.

Propped up against a cigarette tin was a card which had arrived with the boy who brought fresh provisions from Charley's store, saying that a farewell party had been arranged for Mrs Miller and Miss Maynard and that the Committee of the Club hoped that Mr Adrian Hornby would be present. Like hell they wanted him! The wonder was, he mused bitterly, that he was still a member. It would have been better if they had kicked him out, but that would have been too direct a thing to do. Instead they wanted to pity him, smarm him with Christian forbearance and make him feel what a swine he was by comparison with them. If he turned up at the party, he knew exactly what would happen. They would pretend that nothing had happened and would greet him like the Prodigal Son. Then they would be so bloody tactful that he would want to vomit. They'd go on pretending all the evening that they didn't notice

his face, although their guts would be turning over inside them with ~~delight~~.

'Maggie's still ~~scared~~ example to the rest by dancing with him. Just our Maggie for that! For fear of losing the Residency, some of the other old cows would get themselves by dancing with him too. They'd talk about the subject uppermost in their minds, but would never get to it, because they weren't the kind of people to be straightly about anything. That ghastly Mrs Pott had endured agonies with some kidney complaint because she had been unable to bring herself to submit a urine sample for analysis by Mac. The upshot had been that on Mac's instructions a servant had carried a chamberpot across The Green to the hospital in full view of everyone, since when Mrs Pott, although cured, had pointedly shunned McCloskey. And these, mused Hornby, were the people who, if they got the chance would forgive and pity and patronise him. If they got the chance!

There was a hand mirror on the table, hidden beneath a pile of old newspapers. Adrian Hornby these days spent a lot of time with a mirror in his hand. Indeed, the mirror obsessed him almost as much as Diana and, of course, whiskey. The three were inextricably tangled in his mind. To look in the mirror in the early morning was to be reminded that Diana was the author of his misfortune, for it had been she who had led him into the folly of striking John Hudd and the subsequent mad ride homewards. In order to come back to any sense of proportion he felt impelled to drink whiskey, which enabled him to realise that the fault was his own. It was then possible to forgive Diana and, once forgiven, his passion for her went beyond all bounds until nothing but more and more whiskey would help. Then, sullen and vindictive, he once more saw her as blameworthy. It was the kind of vicious circle from which there was no escape.

Things might have been easier for Adrian Hornby if there had been some normal companionship, but there was none. For the thousandth time during these last weeks,

furtively, lest the servants see him, he slid the hand mirror from under the newspapers and gazed earnestly at his reflection. He had expected that he would get used to the ghastly sight after a time, until it had no more power to horrify him, but it was not so. The empty eyes, the scarred cheek were bad enough, but they were as nothing to the cruel, saturnine expression of the mouth and eyes. This was made worse by the missing front teeth. Over the years the fanciful thought had come to Hornby that the still inflamed scars and nightmare mouth were a reflection of the new character he had acquired with his injuries, but in moments of sanity, when pre-occupied by work, he knew how absurd this was. Nevertheless, the illusion persisted, fed by whiskey, which he now needed in greater quantities. Hornby was not aware of the fact, but it was only his injuries—on the ground that he had been sufficiently punished—that were responsible for the dropping of the prosecution against him. Even John Hudd's refusal to be the complainant had not influenced the Resident in his decision. There had also been in the Resident's mind the thought of sparing Diana the ordeal of court hearings, but this he had scarcely admitted to himself.

Hornby looked at the invitation card and then at his watch. In three hours everyone would be assembled at the Club. The party would go on until midnight and then, when the mail boat sailed at dawn, Diana would be gone, perhaps for ever. The curtain of finality would fall upon the mad dreams he had been weaving around her.

Penny appeared around the corner of the verandah, the tip of her tail wagging weakly, waiting for the kind word which would set her whole body wriggling with ecstasy. The empty whiskey bottle struck her in the ribs. Her piteous yelping could be heard until fear took her out of earshot. The Chinese servant who answered the bell, looked at his employer with pitying contempt and then, as ordered, brought another bottle of whiskey. "I think," he said to the other servants when he returned to the kitchen quarters, "that before long it will be as well to seek other employment.

I want no part in the things which will happen here before long. The world is mad. It is a pity for he was always a just simple soul, not much fuss over a woman!"

As the sun set, the world was still. Adrian Hornby was already in the past

as the sun's flaming orb touched the western horizon, and for a moment when the world—that is to say, Chow-li's world—seemed to pause, as though waiting for the dusk as it sank into the sea. It was a cruel, angry sunset, a blend of all the harsh, vivid colours in the spectrum. When it was out of sight, Hornby poured himself out a stiff drink, which he took to the bathroom where, by the light of an oil lamp, he endured the agony of shaving. A cold shower helped him to shed his lethargy. He called to a servant to pack a white dinner jacket and its accompaniments and to have his horse saddled. He would change for the party in one of Chow-li's hotel rooms above the store, going the rest of the way on foot.

Penny, unknown to her master, followed the horse down to the Port, crouching in the shadows outside the store.

Without waiting to be asked, Chow-li produced whiskey. "I'm feeling lucky tonight, Charley," said Hornby. "Let's play a few hands of stud poker."

Charley, or Chow-li, as one cares to think of him, was always ready for a gamble. Provided that he knew the other could and would pay, he was ready to toss double-or-quits for any purchase or, for that matter, any current bill outstanding. But never, in any circumstances whatsoever, did the suggestion come from him. Hornby he knew as a straight man who paid his debts. Charley was himself a straight gambler. His reply was to reach down from a shelf a new pack of cards.

"How much?" he asked, sitting down at the table and pouring himself out a whiskey.

"How much have you got, Charley?"

"Hokay, Mist' Hornby. Sky is limit. Hokay."

When Hornby went upstairs to change two hours later, by which time it was after nine o'clock, he had won over a

thousand dollars* of Charley's money. He was also inflamed with drink and in reckless mood, no longer sensitive regarding his appearance. "I'm going to dance with the most beautiful woman who has ever been seen in the Fort," he announced to Charley when he came down again.

"I think," said Charley shaking his head, "you'd better not go home. Plenty trouble, plenty trouble!"

"You want to win back your money, Charley. That's all right, you don't want me to go. . . ."

"Charley win, Charley lose, all same for Charley," was the reply, uttered in reproachful tones, for the old Chinese liked Hornby and did not wish him to do anything foolish for his own sake. He stood sadly watching while the younger man walked off in the direction of the Fort, followed by the faithful Penny a discreet distance in the rear.

XVI

THE day before sailing was a busy one for Diana. The morning was the best part of it. Packing soothed her, for it was a symbol of departure. Escape from the cramped life of the Fort was at hand. Her private intention was to remain away longer than she announced. If it could be managed, she would not return at all, but wait in Singapore for her brother to join her so that they could go on to New Zealand together. These ideas, however, she kept to herself.

For Jack's sake, and for no other reason, she accepted the invitation to lunch at the Residency, wearing throughout the meal and after a set grin which neither Hugh Kennedy's exaggerated compliments, nor Mrs Miller's thinly disguised hostility, could shake. Maggie, who sometimes had a perverted sense of humour, remarked, addressing Mrs Miller and Diana: "You'll be company for each other on

* Straits dollars.

the boat. A woman travelling alone is at such a disadvantage, don't you think?"

Mr. Miller's concession to her widowed state was a black vest which was worn so jauntily that it achieved the opposite effect from that intended. A crêpe-de-soleil stock which had been dyed black at the Port before it had been laundered, had yellow patches under the arms where the glands of perspiration had set up some curious chemical reaction with the dye.

The Resident, forbidden to give a speech standing up, delivered it sitting down. "For me," he concluded after touching on such remote personalities as Cecil Rhodes, Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Kitchener and Clive, "this is a sad occasion. I think of myself as the father of a large family and, if I say so myself, a happy family. For me, therefore, it is a distressing thought that before tomorrow's sun rises two of my daughters—indeed, my two most beautiful daughters—will have left my roof, one of them alas! for ever."

After luncheon, at Angus McCloskey's urgent request, Diana went with him to see Jimmie who, it seemed, was a reformed character. He had also, according to the doctor, learned how to perform certain tricks which proved his intelligence to be super-normal.

Jimmie was asleep when they arrived, lying sprawled in a deck chair, from which his long hairy arms trailed on the ground. Diana took great care to remain a safe distance from the cage. Jimmie's first act on being awakened was to take off its peg the Manila straw hat he had purloined from Diana on her first visit and to put it on his own head.

McCloskey produced from his pocket a pack of playing cards. Pulling a chair up to the table which was placed immediately in front of the bars of the cage, McCloskey searched through the pack, producing therefrom six cards, the ace to six of spades. These he laid out in a row in numerical order on his own side of the table, handing a similar-appearing pack to the ape.

On Jimmie's face there at once appeared an intent look.

He began slowly to fumble through his own pack. He found the ace, two and three of spades without difficulty, laying them face upwards in that order. On several occasions he handled the five and six, but ignored them. "Let me have that pack, Jimmie," said McCloskey, holding out his hand for it. While pretending to look through the pack, he slipped back the four of spades which he had previously abstracted. With a shrug of the shoulders, he handed the pack back to Jimmie. The latter, with feverish intentness, renewed his search and with a gurgling cry of triumph, laid down the four in its correct place. A minute later this was followed by the five and six.

"Now," said McCloskey, "pretend not to be interested, but watch from time to time."

Jimmie gathered the pack together carefully, handling the cards with infinite care, almost lovingly. From time to time he held one out, looking at it searchingly. His handling of the cards was clumsy, but no more so than a six-year-old child's would have been if unaccustomed to them. Then, leaving Jimmie alone with the cards, Diana and her host went round to the front of the house.

"We'll return in a few minutes to see what he has done," said McCloskey. "The last time I left him alone to play, when I got back he had separated the red cards from the black, but he hadn't been able to separate the court cards."

"But what does it prove, Mac?" asked Diana.

"It proves that Jimmie can distinguish and remember colours. It proves that he has a sense of numerical order. . . ."

"No, it doesn't," Diana interrupted. "When he placed those six spades in order he was copying you. You mustn't assume that he counted the pips. He saw them as shapes."

"Then why did he stop when he couldn't find the four?"

"I think it was because he can only copy, not originate anything."

"You underrate our Jimmie, Diana. As you will see in a little while, he has a certain understanding of symmetry, pattern, order, call it what you like, which he couldn't have

without some understanding of numbers. Only a little, I grant you, but some."

"That's all right," said Diana inconsequently, "that you would like to do this. There's no good will come of it. Even if you could prove that he is all you think he is, and you can prove it, does that mean anything? Will the knowledge make you, or anyone else,

"...ours" is an appallingly feminine and unscientific point of view. If the student or research worker has to ask himself, before he unveils some new discovery, whether it will make him happy, or not, all pure scientific research would come to an abrupt end. At best the answer to the question depends upon guesswork, which has no place in research. The great majority of human beings is obsessed with its own origins and this obsession, doubtless, is the foundation upon which was built the science of heraldry, if it is a science. Look how keen British people are to prove that their forbears came over with William the Conqueror—and the *Mayflower*! The fecundity of her passengers and their descendants is one of the biological marvels of all time. People are enormously interested in their origins and Jimmie—who knows?—is the key to the mystery of all our origins."

"Well, I'm not concerned with things like that. The future is more important than the past."

"Thus speaks a woman. The woman is the cradle of futurity and the normal woman sees herself as a mother, a link with the future. Women aren't interested in pedigree, or they would not have fouled so many. . . ."

McCloskey's vehement manner made Diana look at him. He was no longer the detached scientist, cool and impersonal, but a man inspired to anger by some deeply personal thoughts.

"I think, Mac," Diana said slowly, "that sometime, somewhere, some woman was very unkind to you."

"And if she were," he retorted, "is there anything very remarkable about it?"

"I thought you were going to ask me whether it's any of my business," said Diana, wishing she had kept her mouth shut.

"It's almost every woman's business to take everything and give nothing in return, or a little less than nothing."

"I thought you were too intelligent to talk like that, Mac," said Diana coldly. "It's stupid, and it's rude. You put some woman on a pinnacle she didn't dare to be on and then found that she wasn't comfortable. A halo, isn't a good enough reason for wasting you in this hole and indulging in periodical orgies of self-pity. No wonder you think Jimmie is smart enough to be your grandfather. Perhaps he is. Anyway, don't you think Jimmie has had enough time for his game of patience?"

When they reached Jimmie's cage, the cards lay in a neat pack on the table, while Jimmie himself was fast asleep in the deck chair.

"I'm prepared now," said Diana laughingly, "to admit that Jimmie has many human characteristics. First, he likes an audience for his tricks; second, he gets bored quickly; and third, he likes a nap in the afternoon. And that," she turned to go, "is what I'm going to do. See you tonight!"

"All things considered, Jimmie," said McCloskey, addressing the ape who was now awake, "I think it's just as well she's going off in the morning. I hope to God she stays away...."

By the time Diana had completed her packing it was too late to think of a nap. The crunching of shoes upon the gravel pathway ended a mood of indecision. "Looking for Jack?" she asked, seeing that the newcomer was John Hudd, and knowing as she asked that everyone was aware that Jack would now be in his office.

"No, Diana, I'd like to have a word with you, that is if you can spare time."

Diana tried hard to conceal the annoyance she felt. She had a fair idea of the things John Hudd wanted to say and for her part did not want to hear them. She liked him, but he belonged to Fort Mallet, a place which in her mind was already in the past tense. Her packing was all done. Indeed, the baggage had already gone direct to the ship. In a short while Diana would change into an evening frock and would

go direct from the Club to the ship. If there had been any way of avoiding the party without being rude and without making things difficult for her brother, Diana would have done it, with the excuse,

There was a pleading look in John Hudd's eyes which Diana could not see. So many men forgot their dignity at times like this. Hot avowals were no novelty to Diana, but she shrank from them. A sense of fair play told her that where it was possible men should be spared the embarrassment of stripping their souls bare. A day might come when she would listen to anything a man—the man—might say, hanging on every syllable, taut with excitement, swooning with love. But that day and that man had not appeared. Instead, here was poor John Hudd, wriggling uncomfortably, waiting for some loophole in the stilted conversation in order to say things to which already her ears were deaf.

"What is it you want to say, John?" Diana asked in a voice which tried to be kind and cool at the same time and which merely succeeded in being a little aloof.

John Hudd was not as difficult to deal with as Diana had feared. "I hope you'll have a wonderful time," he said, fidgeting on the edge of a chair, "but all the same, I wish you weren't going."

To say she was sorry, too, would have been absurd, because nothing was forcing her to go away and John knew it. So Diana offered no reply, creating an awkward silence.

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit," continued John, "if you never came back here."

Even now Diana could not think of anything suitable to say.

There came to Diana in these awkward moments an awareness of the need for being kind, where it was possible to be kind without making any foolish commitments. This shy, grave-faced man evidently thought of her in a way it had never occurred to her to think of him. It behoved her, therefore, to make things as easy as she could. Men, she decided, were terribly vulnerable. Without any encouragement they wove dreams and created pitfalls for their own

feet and then, because the dreams came to nothing, wallowed in self-pity.

"I mustn't keep you," continued John. "I know you must have a lot to do."

"In a little while, I suppose, I shall have to try to make myself pretty, but . . ."

"That's called gilding the lily, isn't it?" remarked John seriously. "But," he added, "I know what you mean. Anyway, I'll say what I came to say and go. Diana," he went on flushing, "I've brought you a small gift. It isn't much and probably won't mean much to you, but I'd be so pleased and proud if you'd accept it and—wear it."

From his pocket John produced a string of pearls. Hurriedly, he put them in Diana's lap.

"But John," she protested, "I simple can't accept them. You can only give a thing like that to the girl you're going to marry. They're lovely and I'm terribly touched, but no John. I can't keep them."

"They aren't real pearls, Diana, only cultured. Please keep them. They are given to you with my love and I'm not asking you to accept that unless, of course, you want to. But I don't think you do. It would give me such an enormous amount of pleasure if you would keep them. You can't begin to guess how much. They'll be a link, you see, a link that will bind me to you, but not you to me—unless you want to be bound. But then I'd know, without being told."

Words were tumbling from John's lips at an ever faster rate. "I wouldn't ask you to accept jewels, or anything expensive. I know enough for that, Diana. These, if you must know, cost twenty-two dollars and some odd cents, so you really can accept them without any embarrassment. Please accept them—there aren't any strings tied to them, if you know what I mean."

Diana looked across at John, realising as she did so that his pride would never permit him to use her acceptance as a lever. The thought came to her that if she ever fell in love with John she would have to tell him so, without waiting for a proposal. Remote as this possibility seemed,

she found herself liking John more than she had ever liked him. He was a square, trustworthy. He reminded her of a man she had dated.

"I'll accept them when and if I ever fall in love it will be with a man as decent and straight as you are. Yes, I'll accept them both and I'll wear them tonight. Thank you for them and for the sweet little speech you gave with them."

John rose and went abruptly. Diana recalled the words of an embittered woman on the ship out from England, who had said: "The trouble about men is that the really decent ones are dull as ditchwater, while the amusing ones are mostly blackguards with one-track minds."

XVII

It was nine o'clock by the tinny chiming clock above the Club bar. Two Malay policemen, who had been sitting smoking in the garden, straightened their uniforms and took up a position by the entrance. Several men put hooked forefingers into their unaccustomed stiff collars in a vain attempt to loosen them, cleared their throats loudly and adopted an expectant attitude. Bare-shouldered women prinked with automatic gestures, while from the bar, to provide bathos, came a loud belch which, in truly Anglo-Saxon manner, nobody appeared to hear.

Behind a chaste group of potted palms three Goanese musicians, borrowed from the mail boat which lay at anchor in the bay, reached for their instruments. At a signal from the entrance the 'cellist, laying down his 'cello, began a roll on the drum, gently at first but rising to a crescendo as voices became audible outside.

The Resident, with Mrs Miller on his arm, appeared at the top of the steps, closely followed by Maggie Kennedy and Diana. Throughout the lounge came the scraping of

chairs and, when everyone was standing rigidly, the orchestra struck up God Save the King.

The party had begun.

It was admirably done, proof if proof were of the ingrained British belief that the manner in which the desired end is achieved is fully as important as the end itself. While the National Anthem was being played, the Regent stood stiffly and with expressionless face, leaving no doubt in the minds of all that he was in fact the King's Representative and that every official act was done in the King's name. As the last chords died away, his official face became human again, relaxed and smiling.

The dance was on.

Several men, looking at Mrs Miller, whose gown still bore traces of the ochreous pattern it had worn before going into the dye vat, were heard to remark: "Brave little woman, what?" Their wives seemed to agree, but with the private reservation that for one so recently widowed she was bearing her bereavement with almost indecent fortitude.

John Hudd arrived a little late. Someone at the Mess had purloined his only good dress waistcoat. The one he was wearing was too large. He was in a state bordering on panic lest Diana's program might be filled. Charley's store still stocked dance programmes, tiny little things with pencils attached by silk threads.

Almos the first person John saw was Diana. His heart missed a beat or two, for she was wearing his pearls and looking so exquisitely lovely that he could scarcely bear it. Her gown, acquired in Paris, was of pure white Chantilly lace, fashioned in a pattern of realistic spiders' webs whose texture had the gossamer quality of the real thing. Worn by Diana it would have been a sensational garment anywhere, but in Fort Mallet its impact was stunning. A pulse beat so furiously in John's throat that for a moment he was literally speechless.

"I've saved three dances for you, John," said Diana, coming to his rescue, "and this is one of them."

A moment later they were whirling around the floor to

the music of the inevitable *Blue Danube* which, for the rest of his life John would always remember as the most beautiful music of them all. Even the knowledge that when the morrow's day dawned Diana would be gone had no power to kill the thrilling ecstasy of the moment. The feel of Diana's lithe muscles rippling as she moved; the fragrant perfume she wore; the fact that around her shapely neck were the pearls he had given her; and the maddening aura of warmth and vitality, which he sensed but could not analyse, played such havoc with John that for her sake there was not any folly he would not have committed.

"Doesn't she look simply splendid?" said Kennedy, drawing Maggie's attention to Diana and John. "By Jove! I didn't know young Hudd had it in him to dance like that. Why, you'd think they were professionals."

"Tonight," said Maggie a little sadly, "John could do anything—anything at all. Look, Hugh! The boy's face is simply transfigured."

"So would mine be if I were his age and had his opportunities. 'Pon my soul, the girl is lovely."

"I'm afraid John has it badly," continued Maggie as though she had not heard what her husband had said. "Tonight everything is wonderful, but tomorrow—I can't help thinking of tomorrow. You know, Hugh, whenever I'm tempted to wish that we were young again, I pause. Things hurt so terribly when we're young."

"Bit depressing, aren't you, my dear? I'd be prepared to take a chance of getting hurt for half that young fellow's luck. That is to say," Kennedy added hastily, "if I were young again and hadn't met you."

"There are times, Hugh," said Maggie, surveying him with her candid eyes, "when you remind me of an elderly, disreputable, lecherous tomcat. Go away! Go and dance with the *Merry Widow* and see that you don't get face powder on your lapels. Last time it took an hour to get it off. . . . It wouldn't happen if you danced properly. You don't have to hug your partners."

Suddenly, for no reason apparent to Maggie Kennedy, an awed hush seemed to sweep the assembly. A laneway appeared through the dancers. Somewhere by the entrance a woman screamed. A moment later the music ceased. Those faces which were visible wore an expression of pure horror, as though some great drama were unfolding itself before them. When Maggie stood up, in order to get a better view of what was afoot, all the dancers had gone to the edge of the floor except Diana and John, who were left in the centre. A tall figure, very erect, was walking slowly and stiffly towards them.

Even when the newcomer, all eyes turned towards him, was standing in the full light of a hanging lamp, it was some moments before Maggie and many others recognised Adrian Hornby. The livid scar which ran down his face to the lips was twitching visibly. A gasp of horror went through the room.

Hornby looked insolently round the room, surveying the ring of white, horror-struck faces. "Pretty, isn't it? Take a good look. How do you like it? How do you think I like it?" His harsh voice grated like a file against the background of silence.

Then, with a gesture, of contempt, Hornby turned on his heel and walked slowly towards Diana and John, making a visible effort at self-control as he did so. "Good evening," he said less harshly as he came face to face with Diana. "I've come to ask for the pleasure of a dance with you. May I have the next?"

Diana's brain was working furiously. John Hudd made a move, but with an imperious gesture she stopped him. What had to be done had to be done at once. Every second of delay made the situation more impossible. Diana looked directly at Hornby and, after the first shock, horror turned to pity. "By all means, Adrian," she said gently. "Let's dance!"

As Diana came forward into the light, the design of her gown became visible to Hornby for the first time. "Spiders' webs, eh?" he said with a laugh. "Very beautiful and most appropriate. Consider me a willing fly."

A moment later, with the lifting of the paralysis which had stricken the musicians, Diana and Hornby were sailing around the dance floor to the gay lilt of a Strauss waltz. Hornby danced well, so Diana tried to forget everything but dancing. Neither of them spoke. When after some time the music stopped, Hornby signalled arrogantly for them to continue. This happened three times, until Diana was almost exhausted. Meanwhile, tension was building up. A little knot of men, with the Resident in the centre, was discussing ways and means of ending the situation, although individually they were well aware that, short of creating a brawl, there was nothing to do.

The dancers came to a halt under the huge lamp at the entrance. After a few faltering bars, the musicians stopped too, turning to watch what was afoot. A gasp went round the room as Hornby, with studied deliberation, took Diana in his arms and implanted a brutal kiss full on her lips. This done, he surveyed the ring of faces insultingly and with a contemptuous laugh turned on his heel.

At the top of the stairs, ears flattened and the tip of her tail waving feebly, stood the faithful Penny, looking at her master with mixed adoration and fear. The sight enraged Hornby. Seizing a flower pot, he hurled it at perhaps the only living creature which regarded him without disgust. Her pitiful yelps as she ran into the shelter of the darkness outside seemed to emphasise the brutality of the entire episode. Pausing at the top of the stairs for one more insulting survey of the dance floor, Hornby sauntered away unconcernedly in the direction of the Port.

PART II

I

PAUL HAMMOND poured himself out another drink. "One for you while I'm up, darling?"

"Might as well," replied his wife, Molly, passing her empty glass and resuming the reading of a large pile of mail.

Paul flung himself back into the long chair, picked up a newspaper and yawned loudly.

"What's the matter, Paul?" asked Molly. "Tired, liver out of order, or just bored?"

"Bored, darling, but not with you. I'm bored with Singapore, with business. Nothing ever seems to happen. Don't worry. It will pass."

A moody silence fell while Paul glanced idly through the newspaper and Molly continued to read her mail. The breeze had dropped with the sun and for Singapore the evening was uncomfortably hot and breathless. Twenty minutes or so passed before either spoke.

"You were complaining a little while ago that you were bored, Paul," observed Molly. "Nothing ever seems to happen, eh? I wonder—I just wonder if a month from now you'll be saying the same thing. Somehow, I don't think so."

"What's going to happen in a month's time?"

"I don't know. That's what makes it so interesting. But mark my words, Paul, things will happen. They always do—to Diana."

"That's the girl you've invited to stay here, isn't it? When's she coming?"

"She'll be here two weeks from today, Paul. I must get the mosquito screens mended in the spare room... I'll

quite excited at seeing Diana again. I hope you'll like her . . . but not too much. Read her letter, but don't tell her I showed it to you.

When he began the letter, Paul Hammond merely skimmed it, as he was devoted to matters feminine. Then, the tone of the letter changing, he found himself interested and read on to the end:

... Fort Mallet is quite incredible. It belongs to the last century. The oldest inhabitants, I suspect, don't like me much although I've never in my life behaved so carefully. I'll tell you everything when we meet, but at the moment I am still too shocked by something that has happened to be able to write. . . . I have just come from the funeral of a little man I only spoke to once, but I can't escape from the awful feeling that I am in some way responsible. This must sound mad to you, but it isn't. . . . There's a wonderful old priest here—S.J. By a strange coincidence he turns out to be the brother of Mother Ursula. . . . Most of the people are stodgy and dull. Two nice boys, John and Adrian, both friends of Jack's, have had a violent row which nearly ended in tragedy—and may yet. I know that in the eyes of some of the people I am to blame, but I'm not, Molly, I swear it. At least, so far as anything I did was concerned, I'm not in any way to blame. I keep telling myself that, but—I can only say this to you—I'm not altogether convinced. My two best friends here—apart from Jack, of course—are a half-crazy Scotch-Irish doctor and an orang-utan which—don't laugh—seems quite pathetically devoted to me. But seriously, Molly, I'm terribly unhappy. I learned indirectly by the last mail that since I left England, Gordon is drinking too much and gambling heavily. I have heard nothing from him direct. So far as I am concerned, it is all over; nevertheless, I hate the idea of his making a fool of himself. Meanwhile, I hope it will be possible for you or Paul to meet the ship on the 18th. . . .

Long after he had finished reading, Paul Hammond held the letter appraisingly, as though he were searching for something.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Molly.

"It's the most interesting and, incidentally, the neatest handwriting I've ever seen. The girl must be an artist. Her letter is perfectly formed and yet the writing flows on with such ease and rhythm . . . you'd think it was the writing of a very old woman. . . ."

"I never thought of it until this moment," interposed Molly, "but there's something terribly old about Diana. Old and wise. There was even when she wore pigtails. How clever you are, Paul, to have sensed that just from her writing. Evidently, you're not such a nitwit as I'm sometimes tempted to believe you are."

"Well," said Paul with an expectant air, "she must have something. God knows you've talked enough about her and it isn't everyone who can make a hit with an *orang-utan*. You like her—a lot, don't you?"

"Diana's my best friend. Always has been, Paul. It was one of the greatest disappointments I ever had in my life that she couldn't be my bridesmaid. I adore Diana. She's the loveliest thing you ever saw and although she always made me look like an old hag, I was never jealous of her. But there's something strange about her all the same. We knew it long ago—both of us. She was always more conscious of it than I was. I just don't know how to describe it, Paul, but something happened when she came into a room . . . but wait until you meet her, Paul. I'm not going to say any more now. It wouldn't be fair. What I will say is that Diana was always straight with everyone. If she ever told a lie at school, I never knew of it. Despite her looks, she wasn't conceited—ever. She had five times my brains and it always seemed that learning came naturally to her. . . . I'm terribly glad she's coming, Paul."

"She sounds a paragon, darling. I'll have to scout around among some of the bachelors and see what we can dig up for her."

Molly laughed. "Don't waste your time, Paul. We shall be like the men who made better mousetraps. They'll beat a trail, but you won't be able to keep them out."

"I wonder what you say she is," said Paul thoughtfully, "it seems rather extraordinary that some man hasn't married her. Why isn't she married, Molly?"

"Because she hasn't met anyone she likes sufficiently well, of course. You men are all alike. You think women regard themselves as failures if they can't trap something wearing trousers—just any old man. Diana's very—fastidious."

"Fastidious, my dear," replied Paul loftily, "can just be fancy name for fussy. It can mean that she just doesn't know how to make up her mind. What's the catch?"

"There isn't any catch, Paul," replied Molly irritably, wondering as she said so whether perhaps there was a catch. She pondered this thought, deciding at last that if there were one she did not know what it was. There always had been something strange about Diana, something so elusive that there were no words to describe it. The nuns at school had been aware of it. So had the other girls. Molly remembered now, long after the event, what one girl had said: "Have you noticed that people either like Diana very much, or seem to simply loathe her."

"To me," remarked Paul, "it sounds as if she wants a man. Well, she won't go short of them here. There must be something odd about her, or she would have married. Have you a photo of her?"

"Yes, I have one taken about a year ago, but it doesn't do her justice. I'll get it."

Annoyed, but without knowing why, Molly went to her room and from a drawer produced the portrait which Diana had sent her. She handed it to Paul without comment.

"I'm not saying this to flatter you, darling," said Paul after a brief scrutiny, "but she isn't a patch on you for looks and I've never regarded you as a great beauty. It's true that you're different types, which makes comparison difficult . . . but, Molly, he's not a beauty. She's . . . almost plain."

"It was a mistake for me to have raved about her the way

I have," said Molly. "Forget everything that I've said. There are some things Paul that the camera doesn't see. Take my word for it and now, let's talk about something else. Give me a drink."

Molly and Paul were a devoted couple, though they were in type. She was a voluptuous type of blonde who, if she were not careful, would run to seed, while Paul was a trim, black-haired man with quick movements, a typical fit with the imagination and hot temper of his race. Molly, whose nerve ends were softly cushioned, had the placid disposition of her kind. They were a perfect complement to each other, each having the qualities which the other admired but did not possess.

Paul mixed a couple of drinks. "You know darling," he said after raising his glass, "this *femme fatale* interests me. I'd like to know more, especially since she's going to be here for some time. As you've described her to me, I wouldn't have thought you and she would be great friends. Where's the attraction?"

"She's like her handwriting, Paul. If you can understand that, you can probably understand her. But please believe me, there's nothing abnormal about her. The way we're talking is absurd. She's just tremendously attractive, despite her photo, and if there's anything unusual it isn't so much in her as in the effect she has on some people. I think, Paul, that a lot of people are jealous of her, because apart from her looks, she does everything so well and so—easily. It's like her writing. She can draw beautifully, but hasn't any colour sense. Her water-colours were just terrible. Then she has such poise. At school she was the only one who ever dared to stand up to Mother Ursula, who could simply petrify me. Diana isn't frightened of anyone, or anything . . . except, I sometimes think, herself. And it's as I told you before, Paul, we shan't have to complain of boredom while she's here. Just wait."

It did not escape Molly's notice that when Paul handed back Diana's letter, he stuffed the envelope in his pocket. More than once during the remainder of the evening Molly

for it, but refrained because it foolish. The fact, nevertheless, all proportion to its significance. It were the following morning when, before ate suit go to the laundry, she looked in set and found that he had taken the envelope the office. Knowing Paul's interest in hand- she knew she had no right to be annoyed, which all the more annoying.

During the days which followed, Molly resolved firmly friendship notwithstanding, if she saw in Paul any undue interest in Diana when she arrived, Diana would go— quickly. During three years of marriage she had never detected a roving eye in Paul, but one never knew. She wished, too, that he had not taken the envelope. It seemed so deceitful, somehow.

II

In the firm of Peregrine & Hammond, produce brokers, Colin Peregrine had put up most of the capital. In a world which has always regarded money more highly than brains and experience, it was natural that his name should precede that of Paul Hammond on the partnership letterheads.

Colin Peregrine was in effect a sleeping partner, although he went through the motions of appearing briefly at the office on most weekdays. In addition to a rich father, he possessed a fine physique and a truly magnificent leonine head with a great mass of fair hair. The shape of his head suggested a high intelligence, confounding all the phrenologists, but the most intelligent thing he had ever done in his twenty-nine years was to put his name to the partnership agreement with Paul Hammond. Because people liked him, he was able to bring a great deal of grist to the mill. New clients, learning that Paul understood his business, were glad to

entrust him with theirs, while Colin wandered off on pleasure bent. In the clubs, on the tennis courts, the race course and the golf links, his amiability and his skill at games were his stock-in-trade. The firm of Peregrine & Hammond prospered. Among other things, they were the Singapore correspondents of John Hudd.

Colin Peregrine was a confirmed philanderer. As his victims he preferred married women, for in the long run they were safer game. Promises made to married women meant nothing, whereas their single sisters were apt to take them seriously and in the plans for his own future Peregrine permitted orange blossom no part whatsoever.

Women, ever since he left school, had thrown themselves at him. Some, doubtless, had been attracted by the Peregrine fortune, but most had been drawn irresistibly to the man himself. They liked the way he played games, his physical fitness and the charm which he could turn on at will. They basked in his smile, thrilled to the timbre of his sympathetic voice and, although they would have denied it hotly, spared him the trouble of seducing them. His saving grace was to feel uncomfortable in the presence of the husbands he had cuckolded. When they took off their sun helmets it would never have astonished him to see incipient horns sprouting from their brows. Singapore, furthermore, was too small. Nobody was better aware than Colin Peregrine that some little carelessness might have for him disastrous consequences.

Diana's first public appearance in Singapore was at a gala dinner and dance, given at the Raffles Country Club during Race Week. As her escort the Hammonds produced one of Singapore's most eligible bachelors, Alistair McBain, who, owing to defective eyesight, which had caused his rejection by the armed services in 1914, had used the five subsequent years to amass a considerable fortune. In all other respects, however, he was an excessively dull young man, who suspected every woman he met of wanting to marry him.

Colin Peregrine, dancing with a pretty young married

woman, passed the table just as Diana, without any enthusiasm, was going on to the floor with McBain, closely followed by Paul and Molly Hammond. Colin's loss of interest in his giddy partner was so rapid that she could feel his attention drawn elsewhere. Twice she spoke to him, but he seemed not to hear. Steering her across the floor to where her husband sat, he bowed and made his escape with an almost indecent haste. When Paul and Molly Hammond, Diana and her partner, returned to their table, Colin Peregrine had found a fifth chair and was sitting there. It had all been done so obviously that many pairs of eyes were turned in his direction while Paul, highly amused, was performing the introduction. Nobody noticed Alistair McBain's departure. He left the table for the bar, where he was heard to remark: "Dangerously attractive woman, that! Man could easily make a fool of himself!"

A gilded young ex-guardsman, with the wall-eyed look and flattened moustache of his kind, shortly thereafter insinuated himself into the party, followed by a young naval officer who vaguely had something to do with the Singapore Naval Base, then in course of construction. An A.D.C. from Government House chose the evening to make himself agreeable to Molly Hammond and, having thus subtly—as he believed it—satisfied the conventions, remained at the table until the party broke up. He, the inarticulate ex-guardsman and Colin Peregrine, spent the remainder of the evening glaring at each other and eyeing Diana hungrily, ignoring the existence of the Hammonds.

The efforts of the ex-guardsman and the A.D.C. to inveigle Diana into coming for a moonlight drive round the island would have come to nothing, even if Diana had not refused, because Colin Peregrine, leaving nothing to chance, arranged with the car-park attendant that their respective cars should have flat tyres when the moment came.

Peregrine came home with the Hammonds and Diana, leaving two angry men in the car park to change wheels. At the Hammond bungalow he appeared not to notice the yawning host and hostess, and daylight was not far away

when, reluctantly, he permitted himself to be pushed out into the brief remainder of the night.

"Well," said Molly, when Paul joined her in his room, "didn't I tell you what it would be like? It looks as though Colin has fallen for her in a heap. I wish Diana were more enthusiastic about him. It would be simply lovely if they made a match of it, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know," replied Paul, slowly taking off his shoes. "I find Colin all right as he is. Diana might—well, complicate things."

"Do you like Diana, Paul? You've never told me what you think of her. . . ."

"I don't know quite what I think of her," Paul replied thoughtfully. "But I do know that if I were as fond of her as you seem to be, I wouldn't want to see her tied up with Colin. Speaking as a man and his partner, understand me, I like Colin, but I think he'd be just poison—as a husband. Colin's had the run of too many beds to be happy in one. If I were her father, I'd forbid him to come near the house."

"I think I know what you mean, Paul," said Molly in an edgy voice. "But there's nothing we can do to influence them, is there?"

"I think you might tip off Diana so that she doesn't run into anything blindfold."

"I'll do that, perhaps," said Molly slowly, knowing full well as she said it that she would do nothing of the kind. How much of Paul's solicitude for Diana was disinterested? Was his anxiety, she asked herself, founded upon reluctance to see Colin make a fool of himself because Colin was his partner, or was it based upon resentment of the latter's easy assumption of proprietorial airs where Diana was concerned? Was Paul, in brief, in the least degree jealous of Colin?

Sleep eluded Molly for hours as peace of mind would elude her until she had clear answers to these questions. She had always believed that she knew Paul, knew as far as anyone could what went on inside him. He had never, as the phrase went, looked at another woman.

Molly told herself, he had never been confronted with a woman like ~~Paul~~ lying under his own roof. A man might be called honest because he had never stolen a loaf of bread, but he need not have anything to do with the matter. The only test of real honesty was temptation. Perhaps Paul was merely a faithful husband because no woman had been sufficiently attractive to tempt him to be otherwise.

Even while these thoughts were revolving in her head, Molly knew how foolish and unfair she was being, but the thoughts themselves, unsupported by facts of any kind, were disturbing. The best outcome of all, she decided, just before sleep claimed her, would be for Colin and Diana to fall in love and marry. Furthermore, regardless of what Paul might say or think, she would do everything in her power to that end.

Molly and Diana breakfasted together early the following morning, after Paul had gone off to the office. The talk, naturally enough, turned to the previous evening. Both women agreed that it had been a most successful party and at length Molly steered the talk around to Colin Peregrine, asking Diana what she thought of him.

"I think I'd like him more," said Diana with her usual directness, "if he weren't so obviously pleased with himself. He's rather the professional lady-killer, isn't he?"

Ordinarily Molly liked Diana's bluntness, but this morning less so. Her quick and accurate summary of Colin was somehow disconcerting. "What makes you say that?" she asked, stalling for time. "Well, to me it seemed so obvious, Molly. He says all the right things—and very prettily too, and when, instead of swallowing them whole, as I suppose I ought to have done, I laughed—well, he seemed quite shocked. It was as though I'd made a rude noise in church. Also, you know, I saw several women casting dirty looks at him—and me. One of them slipped a note into his hand while he was dancing with me. I wasn't supposed to see it, of course, but I told him to open it and not to mind me. I'm afraid she heard it, which didn't help much. He blushed like a school girl. . . ."

"Did he open it?"

"Yes, he did, and in a way I didn't notice, reading it he pushed it across the table to me to read. Maybe you saw me burn a slip of paper in the ash tray."

"I did. I wondered what it was. Who was the woman? What was she like?"

"She was a blonde, a good-looking one too, wearing a blue taffeta frock that must have been simply stunning before it was worn out. . . ."

Molly whistled. "That was Kathleen Holderness. Her husband is one of the richest men in Singapore. He's twenty years older than she is and terribly jealous . . . but of course," Molly added hastily, "it may just have been some private joke and quite harmless."

"The look she gave me," laughed Diana, "made me thankful she hadn't a sharp knife. I itched between the shoulder-blades for some minutes."

"Colin's bark is worse than his bite," continued Molly. "He's rather a dear in some ways. Women spoil him, that's his trouble. Everything has been easy for Colin. He started off with good-looks, which help. His father's as rich as Croesus, I believe, and Colin is an only son, so one of these days he'll come into all that. You know, Diana, it's as well that men sow their wild oats a bit before they settle down. Paul sowed a fine crop from all accounts, and—touch wood! —got it out of his system before he married me. Colin's quite harmless, really."

"I'm sure he is," said Diana with a cryptic smile, "at least as far as I'm concerned. Somehow, I wouldn't appreciate the joke very much if one of my *billets doux* were passed around for the amusement of the rest of his—harem. I'd—I'd kill a man who did that to me."

By now Diana, with Fort Mallet, Singapore was a sophisticated centre of gaiety. A continual round of parties, interspersed with golf, tennis, picnics, swimming and riding, helped Diana to forget, if not to silence, a little inner voice which told her that all was not well. At the most awkward and inappropriate moments memory conjured up the vivid personality of Father Courtenay and the occasion when, in the language of the meteorologist, the priest had likened her to the patch of calm at the centre of the typhoon. The mind-picture of herself, thus created, refused to be effaced. Diana tried to tell herself repeatedly what she believed to be true: that priests, by virtue of their calling, could give to the lightest and most airy of remarks a certain profundity. But Father Courtenay was more than a priest: he was a learned and brilliantly intelligent man, who had proved his worth in sciences far removed from the nebulous realm of theology. More than all this, he was Mother Ursula's brother. It was this last which shattered Diana's complacency.

A long while ago Mother Ursula, that formidable old dame from whom nothing ever seemed to be hidden, had said something similar. Possibly because Diana was too young, the words had meant very little at the time, but in the intervening years the entire incident had sprung to memory many times.

It had been a trifling incident. A quarrel had occurred among several younger girls over some forgotten matter. Diana had played no part, but had been a silent witness to what had occurred. Mother Ursula had arrived upon the scene at the moment when the quarrel was at its height. Ugly words were being exchanged and hair was being pulled. After rebuking the girls and sending them on their way, Mother Ursula had turned to Diana, looking at her searchingly. "As usual, I suppose," she had said, "you had nothing to do with the matter? You just happened to be there?"

"I don't even know what they were quarrelling about," Diana had replied with indignation.

"I find it strange," the Mother Superior continued in a far-away voice, "that when there is strife you are never far away. You stand apart while storms around you."

Now, like a ghost, the incident came back to haunt Diana. Once again she could see Mother Ursula's deep-set eyes fixed upon her searchingly.

Diana was too healthy a girl to indulge much in the pleasures and pains of introspection, but she felt the time had come when the vague ideas simmering always in her mind could no longer be pushed discreetly below the surface of consciousness, to be treated as though they did not exist. Was there, she felt impelled to ask herself, some innate quality she possessed which stimulated conflict in others? Diana was reluctant to believe this. She was too healthy-minded. Such an idea was, of its very essence, morbid and unhealthy. It had occurred to her as a possibility that she had developed an unfortunate knack of phrasing her sentences in such a way that ugly passions were aroused in her hearers, but this, too, she dismissed as absurd.

Diana had no illusions about her own attractions for men. The superlatively attractive women of the world—and that was self-evident—had to be prepared for wholesale admiration by men and, because men were what they were, for fits of jealousy. Men were always ready, like barnyard roosters, to do battle for the weaker sex, if a member of it were sufficiently attractive. Rivalry had nothing to do with it: it was mostly vanity and jealousy. Some women liked that kind of thing. It fed their vanity, turned the spotlight on them. But Diana loathed it and, she believed, did her utmost to prevent trouble.

She would never forget the ferocity of Adrian Hornby's assault upon John Hudd, which had broken up, beyond hope of repair, a friendship between two normal decent men. Now Adrian, if not a lunatic, behaved like one, living the life of a self-pitying misanthrope and drinking in

scarred, twisted face that last evening in Fort Mallet was unforgettable. Diana felt no anger against Adrian for the public humiliation he had inflicted upon her: only pity, deep pity. She had never, at any time whatsoever, treated either Adrian or John in any way but lightly, as friends. She had never given either of them the least encouragement to believe that she had formed, or was likely to form, any sentimental attachment for him. But—and this was inescapable—setting aside all question of personal blame, the rupture of the friendship which had existed between them was traceable, however innocently, to her. There was the grim thought that Adrian Hornby had possibly ruined his entire life.

Aboard the ship from Port Mallet to Singapore, the malice which had glinted in Mrs Miller's eyes whenever they met, had been almost frightening. Although she disliked Mrs Miller, as a type rather than as an individual, nothing had happened to warrant the latter's obvious malevolence. It was true that Diana's arrival in the little community had supplanted Mrs Miller as its belle, but even this position had not been very secure. It might reasonably account for a certain dislike and spite in Mrs Miller's heart, but not for the intense hatred Diana read in her eyes. Mrs Miller did not and could not know what had occurred on the last evening of Albert Miller's life, so this played no part. But even here, the fact remained, that after his pathetic declaration before the storm and under the influence of an intense emotion, Albert Miller, profoundly upset by her refusal of his gift, had wandered off in the darkness and the gathering storm to his death. It might have been an accident, but in her heart Diana did not believe that it was. "Smashed to bits . . . that's me!" Those were probably the last words the little man ever uttered. Where, she asked herself with agonising self-reproach, was Diana Maynard to blame?

Fort Mallet and the events of her stay there now seemed to Diana to belong to a remote era. There were other perplexities and problems closer at hand. What created a cold

feeling around her heart was that they were of a similar kind.

A woman knows, without always knowing how she knows, when a man is interested in her. Diana was not comfortably aware that Paul Hammond's attitude towards her went far beyond that of a kind and assiduous host. This realisation created in her a kind of panic. In her simple code the home-wrecker—whether man or woman—was one of the lowest forms of life. She would infinitely prefer to quarrel with Molly, losing thus her oldest friend, than to be the means, however innocent, of causing trouble between her and Paul. Over the next days she decided to watch herself and to watch Paul so that, if there were the smallest chance of the situation getting out of hand, she could pack her bags and leave before any irreparable harm was done.

Colin Peregrine had become a nuisance. The great lover's conceit would not permit him to accept as a fact what was a fact, that Diana regarded him with a derisive contempt. She despised his wholesale venery, the blatant way in which he seduced the wives of his friends and, having received their favours, his callous indiscretion. In ordinary circumstances Diana would have dismissed Peregrine from her mind as lightly as she would have brushed away a mosquito, telling him, if necessary, a few things to deflate his vanity. But these were not ordinary circumstances. She had met Peregrine through the Hammonds. Paul and he were partners and the partnership was one in which Peregrine held the larger financial interest. Diana was resolved to be ultra-careful in seeking a way to rid herself of Peregrine's importunities without the chance of any unpleasant repercussions on the Hammonds.

While these things revolved in her mind, Diana had the sanity to remember that she might be falling into the error of over-dramatising herself and that the fears which obsessed her were groundless.

A beautiful young woman soon acquired an understanding of the wiles and arts of the seducer, or, if she

she succumbed. Diana had never succumbed. There was behind her a strong, staunch resolution. When and if she did succumb, man, and this was an instinctive knowledge, she would give herself wholeheartedly and because she wanted to. The technique of the clever seducer had made her want to laugh. It reminded her of a stereotyped game of chess, played according to set rules and conventions, but without the small ~~the~~ t imaginative genius. On four or five occasions, much to Colin Peregrine's annoyance and embarrassment, she had amused herself by finishing his sentences for him. Any man who was not ~~the~~ bachydermatous would have taken the hint, but Peregrine's sensibilities lay too deeply embedded in vanity for such delicate shafts to reach them.

The situation was, essentially, quite simple. Unless some way of getting rid of Peregrine's attentions presented itself, Diana realised that her best plan would be to bring her stay in Singapore to a close. She was in danger of developing a ~~the~~ hypersensitivity, so great was her fear of bringing trouble to the couple for whom she entertained nothing but the friendliest feelings.

Molly Hammond, who had slept late after an evening which had been prolonged until nearly four o'clock in the morning, came out on to the verandah to find Diana deep in reverie and wearing a worried expression. "You look as though you'd lost a shilling and found sixpence," she remarked. "What's the matter?"

"I'm worried, Molly," she replied, glad of a confidant, but wondering also how far she should go in her confidences. "I think, if you hadn't come along when you did, I was about to pack my bags and be gone."

"For heaven's sake, why?" asked Molly, whose face showed her deep concern. "We're all having a wonderful time. At least, I thought so. Why, thanks to you, Diana, Paul and I are now on the Government House entertainment list which, for people who soil their hands in commerce, believe me, an achievement. What's the matter

"It's a lot of things, Molly, and they're all terribly muddled in my mind, but it's chiefly that—oh, I forget!"

"You aren't going to tell me that you've fallen in love with Diana?" asked Molly with evident delight. "It's been wonderful! It's been obvious, of course, just now, for you—like a ton of bricks—but . . ."

"Heaven's no, Molly! I think he's beneath contempt, thought I'd made that pretty clear to you. . . ."

"He is a bit obvious, I must agree, but if it isn't that, what is it?"

"He won't leave me alone, Molly, and I just can't stand him near me."

"What is all this Diana?" asked Molly sceptically. "You're not going all simple on me and pretending that you don't know how to shake off a man who's annoying you. No, I won't have that."

"I know how to shake him off easily enough," said Diana, bridling a little, "but—now it's out—I don't know how to do it in a way that won't embarrass or cause unpleasantness for you and Paul. After all, he's Paul's partner."

"I see what you mean," said Molly soberly. "You suppose it is a bit awkward. But darling," she said briskly, "I don't want you to have to put up with any nonsense from Colin just for our sakes. I know Paul would say the same. If you don't mind, let's say something to Paul when he comes home for tiffin."

Diana's first thought was to veto this suggestion indignantly, more for Paul's sake than her own. She was worldly-wise enough to know that personal relationships injected into business can have disastrous consequences and it was to avoid this very thing that she was perplexing herself. After some reflection she decided, however, that talking to Paul could do no harm.

Warmed and encouraged by Molly's sympathetic attitude, Diana spilled into her friend's lap all the rest of the fears which haunted her. She told Molly of what Mother Ursula and Father Courtenay had said at intervals divided by ten years and ten thousand miles. She told of the hid-

results of the quarrel between Adrian Hornby and John Hudd and of her own inescapable sense of guilt. But when it came to the tragic episode of Albert Miller, Diana found herself unwilling to confide this to anyone. It was something which could not be discussed without, it seemed, a breach of confidence like a dying confession which, in essence, it had been.

Diana felt better when she had said it all. Mother Church had known something of the quirks of the human soul when she had established the confessional. Diana looked expectantly at Molly, whose face was a studied blank, as though its owner were unwilling to reveal any of her thoughts.

Molly Hammond was of the earth, earthy. She was utterly practical, dealing seldom in abstractions. Hers was a healthy philosophy, unclouded by devious thinking. She had listened to Diana's recital with a lively scepticism as she would have listened to the story of a haunted house, for she could scarcely bring herself to believe in anything which had no palpability.

"Because I'm so fond of you, Di, and because we've always been such good pals," Molly began uncomfortably, "I'm going to put our friendship to a test. I hope—well, I hope it's strong enough, that's all." She paused.

"Go on, Molly, I can take it, I think—from you."

"You need a man, Di! I don't think there's anything wrong with you that a weekend in bed with a man wouldn't put right. . . ."

"Just any man, Molly?"

"No, I wouldn't say that, Di. It ought to be someone you like—a lot. Better still, someone you love. You wouldn't have all those strange ideas if you behaved—normally. There just wouldn't be room for them. You think and worry too much, Di, and you've allowed two chance remarks to get under your skin. Mother Ursula and her brother wouldn't be what they are if they didn't spend their lives weaving a lot of complicated stories around perfectly simple things. I believe we're animals, just like all the rest of them, and the difference is that we've learned a lot of tricks so that

we think we're too far above the other animals to have the same needs and desires. Take my tip, honey, and nip into bed with some nice man and in the morning everything will look different and you'll wonder why you ever made so much fuss about nothing."

Despite herself, Diana laughed. It was so like Molly to reduce a problem to its simplest elements. If one had the right kind of temperament, Diana mused, perhaps Molly was right. Perhaps everything boiled down to sex. The people who were so fond of misquoting Freud seemed to think so. But even as Diana turned these thoughts over in her mind, she knew that so far as she herself was concerned, Molly's solution of things was an over-simplification. Diana could think of few things more repulsive to her than regarding sex in the same way as most people regarded patent medicines, as a kind of cure-all for the ills of the mind and the flesh.

"You're not angry with me for saying all that, are you, Di?" asked Molly anxiously, with an expression of concern which was almost ludicrous.

"Of course I'm not. Why should I be angry? I'm not you believe it to be true, or you wouldn't say it. But I'm not built that way, Molly. I'm not even being priggish about it. I don't even know that I could put into words just exactly what I do mean. . . ."

Diana was spared the embarrassment of saying more by the arrival of Paul Hammond, demanding a gin *pabit**, Singapore's almost invariable prelude to a meal.

Molly Hammond was human enough to be flattered by Diana's confidences. Since the latter had arrived to stay, there had been moments when she believed that the old intimacy between her and Diana had gone for good. Diana had seemed reticent. Their talk had changed all that and Molly threw herself with zest into the task of sparing Diana the unwelcome attentions of Colin Peregrine. Paul gave her the necessary opening by remarking early in the meal: "By the way, Colin has invited us for a midnight swim and picnic.

* gin and bitters.

He's got a boat to take us out to one of the islands. I told him we'd do it tomorrow all right."

"That's all right," replied Molly. "We'll have dinner and then we can't."

Paul, looking bewildered and sensing that there was something behind it all.

Choosing her words with care, Molly explained how Diana felt about Colin Peregrine and how the latter's importunities had forced Diana to say something. Paul listened in silence.

"I'm terribly sorry about this, Diana," he said at length. "Molly hasn't been very precise about it, but I hope Colin hasn't been too—outrageous."

"No, Paul," said Diana easily. "He hasn't really done anything in particular that it is too terrible. It's just his manner and his—well, his single-track mind. A little of it is funny, but after a while it becomes boring and—disgusting. But I want you to understand that I wouldn't for the world use you any embarrassment because, after all, he's your partner and the two things just aren't in any way related. The task is that you or Molly arrange matters so that I'm not left alone with him. If you do that, then there need not be any unpleasantness of any kind."

"Paul," interposed Molly, "I think you ought to know that it's serious enough for Diana to have said to me an hour ago that, if necessary, she would leave us."

Paul Hammond's face darkened "I just don't know what to say, Diana," he said. "I blame myself I ought to have known better. But, partner or no partner, I give you my word that you won't be annoyed by him any more. I'm seeing him this afternoon and, let me tell you, he's going to hear a few things that are good for his soul . . ."

"But don't you see, Paul," said Diana with entreaty in her voice, "that's just the sort of thing I wanted to avoid. I would never forgive myself—never, Paul—if I was the means of causing trouble between you and Colin. It isn't worth it, Paul. I promise you it isn't."

"It is my house, Diana," said Paul quietly, "and you're

my guest. You met Colin through me and, whether I like it, or not, I am responsible. This is something that I must settle with him and in my way.

With sinking heart Diana realised that anything she would influence Paul.

IV

WHEN the partners in Peregrine & Hammond met that afternoon, it would have been so easy for Paul to have said lightly: "Look here, Colin, old chap, be a pal and take your fatal fascination away from Diana. We feel responsible for her and, you know what I mean, we wouldn't like anything unfortunate to happen."

Something of that nature would have achieved its end. Colin Peregrine would have taken the hint. Because, done like that, it would have added to his own stature and fed his belief in his own irresistible powers of attraction, he would have been delighted. He would have left the office with the warm glow of righteousness upon him, riding a metaphorical white horse and clad in equally metaphorical shining armour. Furthermore, his opinion of Paul as a man of great discernment would have risen amazingly.

When Paul and Colin had completed their business that afternoon the latter said: "By the way, I thought this evening that I'd take Diana for a drive early and leave you to join us at the boat about seven o'clock, if that's all right with you."

"It would be all right with me, Colin," said Paul coolly, "but I'm afraid the party's off."

"Why? What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened except that Diana won't go."

"Why?"

"Because, if you must have it, she can't stand the sight of you. There it is and there's nothing I can do about it."

Colin Peregrine flushed darkly. "I think, if you don't mind," he said in a thick voice, "I'd rather hear that from Diana."

"I'm afraid you won't have the opportunity, Colin, so I'll tell you. I were you. Diana doesn't want to see you."

"Like hell she doesn't. What you really mean, Paul, is that *you* don't want me to see Diana. That's the way the cat jumps, is it?"

Paul was still quite cool. His partner's words, uttered with such a knowing air, rang a little bell. It dawned on him, suddenly and with a sense of horror, that what Colin had said was not quite so foolish as it sounded. It was true. *I don't want Colin anywhere near Diana. She's much too sweet and clean to be soiled by contact with a fellow who spends his life crawling in and out of beds where he has no right to be. Partner or not, to hell with him.*

"Now, Colin, you're just talking like a fool," said Paul, hoping, but doubting, that his words carried the ring of conviction.

"We'll see about that!" was Colin's Parthian shot as he swept out of the office.

Molly answered the telephone when Paul rang. "I have an idea that Colin is on his way out to make a scene, darling," he said. "I thought I'd warn you. I told him Diana didn't want to see him, but he wouldn't take my word for it."

"Does that mean that you've had a frightful row with Colin?" asked Molly anxiously.

"He got a bit hot under the collar, but he'll cool off. You must see, darling, that I had to do something. After all Diana is our guest."

"Yes, Paul, Diana is our guest," echoed Molly in a dead voice, "and Colin is your partner. Or had you forgotten that?"

"Now don't be foolish, Molly. . . ."

Molly had hung up. Talk would do no good—now she needed to think and then to act.

Paul, meanwhile, replaced the dead receiver on the hook,

debating with himself whether, or not, to return home. Strange new thoughts were seething and bubbling and, until they had sorted themselves out, he was reluctant to face Molly.

Angry and wounded where it hurt most, but still buoyantly doubtful whether Diana's attitude had been rightly interpreted to him, Colin Peregrine drove furiously out of the Hammond's bungalow. His reputation was at stake. More than one attractive Singapore matron had chided him for his neglect since Diana's coming, rightly pointing to Diana as the cause. Not in words—his reputation for gallantry would not permit that—but by his manner, he had made it quite clear that he was on conquest bound and that victory, if not already achieved, lay within reach. To be rebuffed now would do incalculable harm to the Peregrine legend and to the shoddy edifice he had erected around himself. He had forgiven a married woman who had blackmailed him with the threat of telling all; he had forgiven another who in a moment of rage had hurled a bottle of ink at him. These were occupational hazards, akin to Heidelberg duelling scars. But it was not in Colin Peregrine's nature to forgive a rebuff.

Molly Hammond, during the brief interval between Paul's telephone call and Colin's arrival, did some fast thinking. She was aware that Colin could, if he wished to do so, create a situation which might easily result in Paul's business ruin and she was determined to do all that lay in her power to avert such a catastrophe. Faced with this possibility, Molly did not hesitate to put the material issue before Diana's well-being. This was a down-to-earth situation which she understood and there was nobody she would not sacrifice if the need arose.

Diana was in her room. "Something dreadful has happened, Di, and there isn't much time to tell you," Molly began. "Paul and Colin seem to have had a frightful row—about you. Colin is on his way out here now. I hate to ask this of you, but I must: will you please be nice to Colin and give me a chance to smooth it all over. It might," she

added slowly, giving her words heavy emphasis, "be disastrous—for us."

Diana would have given almost anything at that moment to have been able to say, "I'll do what I can, Molly," she said in a dead voice, "but won't this make Paul out to be an awful liar? Have you thought of that?"

"I've thought of everything, Di. I don't know what Paul said, but I do know that if I—we don't do something, there'll be a flaming row and at the end of it all Paul and I won't have a penny to bless ourselves with."

"I'm so terribly sorry, Molly, but really Paul must have said far too much, far more than was necessary."

Yes, Molly agreed privately, Paul must have said far too much. She looked searchingly at Diana who, cool and lovely, returned her gaze unflinchingly. No, she decided, whatever mad ideas were in Paul's mind, Diana did not know of them. No woman could be such a consummate actress. With slow, deliberate movements, full of grace, Diana began to dress.

Whatever turmoil there may have been below the surface, Molly reflected, she appeared completely calm, as though quite unaffected by it all. Father Courtenay had hit the nail right on the head: Diana *was* like the patch of calm at the centre of a storm. The world might be falling in ruins around her, but she herself was cool, collected, mistress of herself. No wonder men behaved like fools about her! But there was one man—Molly hid her gritted teeth behind a smile—who wasn't going to make a tool of himself for her sake, and that man, unless it was already too late, was Paul Hammond.

"Tuan Pe'g'ine has called," announced a servant after a discreet knock on the door.

"Tell him we will be down directly," replied Molly firmly.

Diana, having completed her toilet, looked searchingly at Molly. Then, unable to read anything from a face which had grown hard and inscrutable, there came to her for the first time for years the impulse to pray. Disregarding Molly's presence, Diana dropped to her knees beside the bed. It was

a vague prayer, directed nowhere in particular, but like a wireless signal, sent out into the void of the Infinite, where, it seemed likely, were the ends of the strings which actuated human marionettes. Diana prayed, with all the fervency of her nature, that during the next hours events might be so contrived that through her no harm might come to Paul and Molly Hammond. It was an unselfish prayer, for Diana faced the fact unflinchingly that she herself might be called upon to pay the price of her friend's immunity from harm.

The strangest thing about prayers, perhaps, is that they are sometimes answered.

V

COLIN PEREGRINE was both charmed and mystified by his reception. Whatever unpleasantness there might have been—and unless Paul were an unmitigated liar, which he did not believe, there must have been some—had disappeared. During the half-hour he had been in the Hammond bungalow Diana, far from showing any aversion to him, had been more friendly and effervescent than he had ever known her to be.

The explanation with which Peregrine decided to content himself was that the famous Peregrine charm had once more demonstrated its infallibility. Indeed, so delighted was he, that in the manner of one conferring a favour, he decided to delay no longer the seduction of Diana. Paul, he sensed, would not put in an appearance after the scene at the office. It would not be too hard to lose Molly, for in her he knew intuitively that he had an ally.

“I vote we give Paul another fifteen minutes,” suggested Colin, “and if he doesn’t come then, don’t let’s wait for him. We can leave a note at the Yacht Club and one of the boys can bring him out later.”

“I hardly like to leave Paul flat like that, Colin,” prodded

Molly. After all, he *is* my husband. Of course, I know you don't think much about the "rights and convenience of husbands"—you home-wrecker, you—but I have to. Why not you and Diana go ahead, leaving Paul and me to join you later?"

The lightly uttered words had amazingly diverse effects upon those present. Molly, who uttered them, felt as Judas must have felt. Colin Peregrine thought them quite the most delightful and sensible words he had heard for a long time: delightful because they were a tribute to his prowess and sensible because they would enable him to have a long tête-à-tête with Diana. Molly was a smart woman. *She* didn't want to see Peregrine & Hammond broken up. *She* knew which side her bread was buttered on.

Diana heard the words with a sinking heart. She knew that she had been trapped neatly by Molly. She knew, furthermore, that because she could never bring herself to forgive Molly, her friendship was already dissolving before her eyes. This, however, did not alter her resolution. One cannot, she knew, utter a prayer such as she had just uttered and then, when it is answered, refuse to take advantage of its fulfilment. She had prayed that she might not be the means of harming Molly and Paul. All she had to do was to fall in with the suggestion in a light and casual fashion, leaving Molly and Paul to settle matters in their own way. Everyone would be satisfied, everyone, that is, except Diana.

Repressing a shudder, Diana said: "All right, Molly, let's arrange it that way. But be along as quickly as you can. I don't think any woman's reputation can stand being too long on an island with Colin."

Peregrine seemed to purr with pleasure. Sighing with relief that Paul had not put in an appearance—the near quarrel now completely forgotten—he ushered Diana into the car, waved goodbye to Molly, and set off. Instinctively, he chose the route past the Seaview Country Club, wishing to exhibit his latest conquest. Five minutes after parking the car at the Yacht Club, the ropes were cast off the launch. The servant who would have accompanied them if it had

been a *parti Carré*, was left looking bewildered on the dock to form any conclusions he pleased.

"Oughtn't we to leave word for Paul and Molly?" asked Diana.

"Of course! Silly of me to forget!" said Colin, who turned to the servant and said in Malay, which he knew Diana did not understand: "If Tuan Hammond comes, tell him you do not know where we have gone."

A glint of understanding came into the boy's eyes as he turned in the direction of the Yacht Club's kitchens, where the story of his master's latest and most luscious conquest would find willing listeners. Before going home he felt bound to go to the Seaview Country Club where his brother-in-law, who was the Number Two bartender, had drawn Diana in the sweepstake. For a long time Peregrine's amours had aroused the gambling and sporting proclivities of the Chinese servants employed in the relatively small circle of Europeans who might be regarded as the élite. The lucky bartender who had drawn Diana had already refused \$65.00 for his ticket and stood to win some eight times that amount. The favourite, bought in by the Head Porter at Raffles Hotel, was the young wife of a certain nameless Singapore lawyer, whose work frequently took him to Kuala Lumpur and Penang. The lady's favouritism in the market had been clinched by her well-known inability to say no.

There were many ladies in Singapore who, if they had known how excellently well-informed their servants were, and how religiously they broadcast the smallest details, would have been much more careful in their amours. Nothing—literally nothing was safe from observation.

Meanwhile, Colin Peregrine set out to be at his most charming. Diana, because she knew nothing of wine, had once remarked that she enjoyed the abomination known as sparkling burgundy. The picnic hamper, therefore, contained a bottle. There was a silver box filled with the brand of Turkish cigarette which she occasionally smoked. The portable gramophone was accompanied by some of her

favourite records. These and others were the silent proofs that Colin Peregrine brought to his chosen vocation the qualities which were best calculated to crown his efforts with success. And as the darkness fell and it was apparent that the Hammonds were not coming, his behaviour was all that could be desired.

With the launch moored alongside a small island owned by one of the great oil companies, the lights of distant Singapore growing brighter as the sun's light drained out of the sky, and the gramophone playing a haunting *serenata*, Diana tried to maintain for her own comfort the illusion that all was well. She tried to forget that all Peregrine's thoughtfulness meant as much as the antics of a trained seal and that she was now being given Part One of the famous Peregrine technique. It was, she mused, with a sudden gleam of grim humour, rather like the sedative which was customarily given to a patient facing a grave operation.

Because Peregrine looked best in profile, he sat with his profile in silhouette against the western sky. His finely shaped head and leonine crop of hair gave him the appearance of high nobility. He turned to Diana, as though to speak, and then appeared to change his mind. Diana did not rise to the bait, as most women did, by asking him what he had been going to say.

"I suppose, Diana," he began a few moments later, "that you've been told until you're sick and tired of hearing it, that you are beautiful beyond belief."

"Of course I am, Colin," she replied unexpectedly. "It's like a parrot cry. It doesn't mean anything except that the men who say it haven't any originality. I'm sure *you* wouldn't say anything so banal, would you, Colin? Since we're on the subject, Colin," she continued remorselessly, "what is *your* usual opening gambit?"

This was against the rules. Peregrine took refuge in dignified silence. When he next spoke, several whole minutes later, he sounded hurt. "Although we've seen a lot of each other, Diana," he began, "this is the first time we've been alone together for more than five minutes."

"I know, Colin. Aren't I lucky?"

"I wish you'd be serious, Diana."

"But I am serious, Colin. ~~I was never more serious in my life. Don't you think I was lucky?~~"

This was not only against the rules, but proof positive that the woman had no soul. In fact, all things considered, it showed she had no manners. Peregrine had never come up against anything quite like it. Now, he decided, was the time to keep his temper, show that he didn't mind having his leg pulled a bit. At all costs he must not let the saucy little bitch know she was getting under his skin.

"I think I could manage a small drink, Diana. How about you? There's whiskey, a bottle of fizz on the ice, some cold beer and, if you'd like it, a bottle of sparkling burgundy. . . ."

"For me," said Diana, who was thirsty, "a bottle of beer, please. Beer's such a romantic drink, don't you think? I simply adore the smell of a brewery on malting days. What there to eat? I ate a very light tiffin and I'm simply ravenous."

"We've some caviar—tinned I'm afraid, some cold duckling and a kind of mixed vegetable salad with mayonnaise, followed by some peaches—also out of a tin."

"What a perfectly wonderful picnic meal, Colin. And caviar, just fancy that! What a lucky man you are, Colin, to be so good-looking and so rich! If I ask you a question, Colin, will you try to give me a completely truthful answer?"

"If I answer it," he replied cautiously, "I'll tell the truth."

"Then tell me, is it the good-looks, or the money, do you think, that makes you so irresistible?"

The evening was getting out of hand and was not at all to Peregrine's taste. "I didn't know that I was supposed to be so good looking," he replied, keeping his temper with difficulty.

"Ah! Then it *is* the money, Colin. I thought so. You must have a tremendous lot of it. But even so, I'm sure that *some* women find your Greek-god head devastatingly attractive. I hope so, for your sake, because it can't be very flattering to be liked just for money."

Peregrine busied himself with the picnic basket. It gave him time to rally his shattered forces and to plan the counter-attack.

Diana, meanwhile, was buttering some biscuits and spreading a thick layer of caviar on each. She ate them with gusto. Peregrine looked quite shocked. Hitherto, women about to be seduced had never seemed to have good appetites. They showed a tendency to talk in hushed whispers, all of which he found very right and proper, a fitting tribute to the perfection of his own technique.

"You're very silent this evening, Colin," remarked Diana a few minutes later with her mouth full of duck, waving a plump leg like a baton. "Something wrong?"

Peregrine's mind was revolving in wide and rapid circles and arriving precisely nowhere. What did all this mean? Was it, he wondered a part of some elaborate practical joke hatched up by the Hammonds and Diana? The girl was being damned offensive and was, quite obviously, highly amused by something. But what? As she had observed, he was silent, and for the good and sufficient reason that he couldn't think of anything to say. But he simply had to say something. "I had hoped, Diana," he said sadly, "that we were too good friends to need to chatter continually."

"No, no, Colin," said Diana, waving the duck's leg at him reprovingly. "That's not worthy of you. Why, it took you the best part of two minutes to think of that one. To be effective, that sort of thing has to be said quickly—spontaneously. I tell you frankly that I'm most disappointed. I did hope you were going to put on a really sparkling performance for me this evening. I'm hurt, Colin, hurt."

Diana was not as much mistress of the situation as she appeared to be. She was only too well aware of this, aware also that by making it impossible for Peregrine to play the rôle of seducer the polite, refined way, she had laid herself open to certain risks. But events had conspired to make Diana reckless. Beneath all her insulting banter, she was deeply hurt and angry with herself for having been tricked into the present situation. That what she had done had been

to prevent trouble for Molly and Paul—which must have been quite obvious to Molly—should have entitled her to some consideration. Where Peregrine was concerned, Diana had no fear. With him her best weapon was her tongue. With it she knew that she had the power to make him writhe and squirm. She sensed that he had what the Wild West writers were wont to call “a yellow streak a yard wide” and that, however dishonourable his intentions might be and, undoubtedly were, she could master him.

Molly, as Diana had always known, was a realist, brutally so at times. Molly had—and it was hard to blame her—put first things first. An open breach between Paul and his partner might have spelled ruin for Paul, so Molly, without reckoning the cost to her old friend, had done what seemed best to her. It was the manner in which it had been done, rather than the fact itself, which hurt. There was, as Diana saw things, something ugly in playing upon the sympathies and loyalties of an old friend as a prelude to betrayal. With cold-blooded deliberation Molly had so engineered matters that at best she—Diana—was bound to suffer a smirched reputation.

Diana permitted herself a little grim amusement. She did not like the situation, but it was time someone deflated Peregrine’s ego, and whatever her personal annoyance might be, it would be better than being haunted by the knowledge that once again, without wishing to do so, she had brought trouble to others. Somehow, unless it were to poison her whole life, she must escape from the stupid belief that in some uncanny way she was a harbinger of evil for others, with the gift—as Father Courtenay had suggested—of remaining safely at the calm centre of the storms which her presence engendered, while those in the wild perimeter were dashed to destruction. Diana was aware that she was in danger of losing her sense of perspective, magnifying events out of all proportion to reality, but this time, she was determined, however callously Molly might have behaved, that the price, whatever it might be, would be paid by herself. It might be a bitter price, but it would at least allow her

to lay the ghost which haunted her waking hours and to cease thinking of herself as some dark bird of ill omen.

While Diana was indulging in her reverie, Colin Peregrine recovered the use of his tongue. "You've been having quite a bit of fun at my expense, haven't you Diana?" he said. "Hard words break no bones, I know, but all the same you've had your knife into me and I have the idea that you've enjoyed twisting it—just for luck. Why? If you don't like me, that's your privilege. But have I ever done you any harm? I've been asking myself that question and, 'pon my soul, if I have, I don't know it. Have I, Diana?"

"No, Colin, not to my knowledge," said Diana, admiring the neat way in which he was turning the tables.

"I thought not. Forgive me if I'm wrong, but it seemed to me when we left the Hammond's house that you came quite willingly. I'd almost go so far as to say that you came with me—eagerly. It makes it all rather bewildering if I'm right. Why bother to spend an evening with a man merely for the fun of insulting him? It seems to me a bit pointless and, if you will forgive me, rather rude. Then there's something else. It's a long time since I read my Bible, but I seem to remember something to the effect that 'the wicked flee when no man pursueth'. No man has pursued you this evening, you know, but you are very obviously on the defensive and, as I'm the only person here, you must be fleeing from me...."

"I like that, Colin, it's first rate," said Diana with a laugh. "You're good. We must keep those lines in. That more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger voice of yours is really most convincing. It almost convinced me and it's quite convinced you. You'd have made a fine actor, Colin, that is if you didn't drown yourself in your own tears... and now, having given such a fine performance to a truly appreciative audience, don't you think it's time we were moving? It will take us at least an hour back to the Yacht Club and it must be after nine o'clock."

Diana had under-estimated the depth to which her barbed shafts would penetrate Peregrine's tough epidermis. She

had under-estimated, too, the intense malice of which he was capable. Hitherto his good looks, undoubted charm and wealth—these in any order—had insulated him from the truth about himself. Under the lash of Diana's tongue he had seen himself as she saw him. He realised with growing horror what a cheap, contemptible figure he cut in her eyes, and the knowledge seared him. Ridicule—that most potent of weapons—had flayed him until he was raw. He had reached the point where he knew he could take no more of it without doing something desperate and violent. He shrank from this. Violence was foreign to his nature. Violence, as he saw it, was the last refuge of the blundering incompetent and in the realm of seduction, Colin Peregrine was not that. He was the exponent of the rapier, never the bludgeon. There was one more weapon left in his armoury and this he proceeded to use.

Going into the little cabin of the launch, he lit an oil lamp. With great care he arranged a mattress and a pillow on one of the side benches. From the locker he produced a tattered Red Ensign, which he proceeded to hang as a curtain. Taking the other mattress and a pillow, he emerged from the cabin and with the same care prepared another bed.

With a mocking "Good night and sleep well!" Colin Peregrine removed his jacket, tie and shoes and within a few minutes gave every appearance of a man sleeping the sleep of the just.

Diana, depriving him of the amusement and satisfaction of protest, bowed to the inevitable. She had no means of forcing him against his will to return to the Yacht Club. With a shrug, she turned into the cabin and made herself as comfortable as possible. She had goaded Peregrine beyond endurance and now, she realised, she must make the best of it. She had the justice to believe that had their positions been reversed, some such neat revenge would have been hers.

Human perversity is a strange thing. Diana, knowing perfectly well that after her return from an all-night excursion with this modern Casanova, her reputation would be unable

to survive, could still see events through his eyes. Incredibly, for the first and only time since she had met him, she almost liked him. *Pretence* had gone. Colin Peregrine had nailed the skull-and-crossbones to the masthead, the perfect blackguard to the end.

VI

FONG, who was Colin Peregrine's personal servant, had not been idle since, from the Yacht Club dock, he had watched his master leave with Diana in the launch. He had gone immediately to the Raffles Country Club, where Quong, his brother-in-law, who was Number Two bartender, would be on duty. Fong, on the strength of an excellent idea which had hatched in his fertile brain, treated himself to the unaccustomed luxury of a rickshaw for the journey. Lolling back at ease while his sweating countryman laboured at the shafts, he rehearsed the coming talk. He was in possession of valuable information, with which he was determined not to part until he had received an adequate consideration.

The fact that Quong was on duty involved Fong in further expense. For the favour of being permitted to wear one of the uniform jackets provided for the staff of the Raffles Country Club, together with the polished brass number-plate of a man who was off duty, Fong slipped a dollar into the hand of the Chinese Head Steward, a genial, portly functionary, who looked more like a bishop than a bishop himself. However, large matters were at stake and Fong believed that he who would catch a whale must be prepared to bait his hook with at least a herring.

Quong, when Fong arrived at the bar, indistinguishable in appearance from the other servants, was so surprised that he slopped too much angostura bitters into a John Collins he was mixing. This order served, there was a lull, for the rush hour had not begun.

Quong was one large question mark, but the decencies had to be observed. To have asked, as he felt impelled to ask, "What brings you here masquerading in the Club uniform?" would not only have been grossly impolite, but would have involved him in loss of face. Instead, he asked: "I trust that your respected father is well?" On being assured that Fong's father was enjoying the best of health, Quong made enquiry as to the health of the rest of the family. It was then Fong's turn to enquire about the health of his own sister, Quong's wife. She, it transpired, had only that morning expressed the opinion that she was pregnant. "Then," said Fong handsomely, "I hope that, like a dutiful wife, she will give you a son." Quong hoped so too, for her last two pregnancies had ended with daughters. It was, all things considered, not the moment to disclose his private intention of lambasting her with a bamboo if she repeated the error.

Family matters exhausted, Quong approached the kernel of things by remarking: "Our Club uniform suits you extremely well. What a pleasure it would be for me if you were to leave your present master and work here!"

This was Fong's cue. "Touching my master," he began delicately, "it seems that I remember that you hold the ticket which bears the name of the dark one who is the guest at the Hammond bungalow. What a magnificent thing it would be if she were the winner!"

"Indeed, yes, but such good fortune, I fear, is not for me. . . ."

"And yet, if rumour does not lie, you refused \$100 for your ticket. That, surely, suggests great confidence?"

"It was not \$100," replied Quong, who knew perfectly well that Fong also knew that the sum was \$65, "but a smaller sum. The winner, I am told, will receive almost \$1,000. To win such a sum a man needs to be in high favour with the gods."

"Or," added Fong suggestively, "in high favour with someone who had knowledge that he has not disclosed to anyone."

"Ah!" observed Quong, excusing himself to serve a whiskey, doing so with his thumb in the measure. "To obtain the high favour of such a person might cost more than a poor man like myself could afford."

"It would not cost you one copper cent. For half the ticket and, because you are the husband of my own sister, not one cent in cash, I will guarantee that before tomorrow's sun sets you will hold the winning ticket."

"How do I know that you are speaking the truth?"

"Who in all Singapore is better placed than I am to know the truth? Ask yourself that. What profit is there to me if I am not speaking the truth? Do you suppose that I went to the expense of coming here by rickshaw and the further expense of hiring this uniform, merely for the pleasure of hearing my own voice? Half of a losing ticket is of no value to me. With my help, I tell you, you are the winner. Without it, your ticket is worthless."

"And to think," said Quong sadly, "that you would drive such a hard bargain with your own sister's husband."

"It is because you are my own sister's husband that I did not come to you deceitfully, or by means of an intermediary, to buy the ticket for myself. For \$100, or certainly for \$125, I could have bought it. Of my high regard for you, there is the proof."

Quong surrendered. The force of Fong's logic was too great. When the transfer of half the ticket had been effected, Fong revealed the excellent facts. "I am on duty for many hours," said Quong breathlessly. "It is for you, therefore, to arrange for witnesses, so that when your master and the woman return to the Yacht Club, all can be duly attested. Knowing your master and knowing that he does not take a beautiful woman out for the night in order to admire the moon, the committee will, without argument, adjudge me the winner."

With the comforting knowledge that by the following day he would have won a nice round sum, Fong returned to the Yacht Club where, enlisting three of the Club servants as witnesses, he prepared for an all-night vigil.

The night was well spent, for in the early hours of the morning a brilliant idea occurred to Fong. The fame of his master's successes with women, no less than his reputation for virility, had spread far and wide. If, subtly, it were possible to spread the story that this famous virility was due to some rare drug of which he, Fong, held the secret, the commercial possibilities were almost boundless. He could hardly wait before discussing the matter with an acquaintance who owned a pharmacy.

Some thirty minutes after dawn a lookout at the Club signalled the approach of the launch, which would have been absent for approximately thirteen hours. In thirteen hours, alone with this woman, the committee of judges would have no choice but to assume that Peregrine had initiated her into the eternal mysteries.

In addition to the entire staff of the Yacht Club, some four members were present with upraised eyebrows as the launch docked. Diana faced their stares unconcernedly. It was the only thing to do.

Denials would serve no useful purpose and would merely draw further attention to herself.

As they walked up the dock together, with Fong bringing up the rear laden with the debris of the picnic, Diana looked at her companion, realising as she did so how completely she had played into his hands. Colin Peregrine croat not in the least upset by the fact that she had turned ear to his blandishments. He did not care. She meant n^o help her to him physically than a score of other women. He^loyal got what he wanted. In these moments of triumph, strutting in delight before the witnesses gathered, Colin Peregrine knew that before the day was out all Singapore would know that another prized scalp—that of the acknowledged beauty, Diana Maynard—had been added to his collection. That she had in fact scornfully refused his advances *bad already been forgotten.*

As they turned the angle of the floating dock, Diana surrendered to an irresistible impulse. With a score or more pairs of eyes on her, she pushed Peregrine into the water,

noting with enormous satisfaction that he could not swim. She stood by laughing while two men armed with boathooks dragged him to the dock and hauled him, dripping, from the dirty water. The push had been given deliberately and nobody could believe it to have been an accident.

All who witnessed the affair laughed loudly, all that is except Fong, who was terrified lest the committee of judges would allow the incident to influence their decision.

Hailing a rickshaw, Diana went off alone to the Hammond bungalow.

VII

DIANA was relieved to learn, on arrival at the Hammond bungalow, that Molly had already gone out for an early morning round of golf. Going up to her room, she at once began to pack, hoping to be away before Molly returned. But this was not to be.

Molly entered the bungalow just as the servants were carrying Diana's luggage into the hall. The two women met face to face. Impulsively, Molly said everything essential.

With her greeting "I'm sorry, Di, so damned sorry that—great. To be you. Do you understand?"

"Fong, I understand, Molly. It isn't so very difficult to understand, is it?" A faintly contemptuous smile hovered over Diana's otherwise cold and expressionless face.

"Where are you going, Di?" asked Molly, with concern in her eyes and voice.

"To one of the hotels, until my boat sails for Port Mallet."

Molly Hammond's mind was working fast. Now that Diana had served her purpose, the harm to Diana must be minimised. "Don't do anything hasty, Di," she implored. "However much you may loathe me and despise me, it's better to go on staying here. Otherwise, it will look as though we have disowned you. Take my tip and brazen it

out. Treat the whole thing as a joke and you'll get away with it. Go now and your reputation will be torn to tatters."

"It's a little late, isn't it, Molly, to think about my reputation?"

"Paul and I will give a party for you. But don't go, Di, because to run away now would be construed as, well, as a sort of confession, you know what I mean."

The advice was probably sound. Diana knew that. She paused for a few seconds to ponder the matter, but she knew at once that, temperamentally, she would be unable to go through with it. At no matter what cost to her reputation, she could not bring herself to spend another night under this roof where, she knew, her own betrayal had been planned and executed with cold-blooded deliberation. "Thank you, Molly," she replied in calm tones which belied the inner turmoil, "but I must go. I can't trust myself to talk to you—ever again."

"I expect I should feel like that—in your position," said Molly frankly. "To say I'm sorry doesn't carry much conviction, I know, but I am sorry. And yet, Di, I won't be a hypocrite, because, faced with the same problem, I'd do the same thing again. For Paul and me, don't you see, I'd sacrifice anyone or anything. The tragic thing is that it had to be *you* because, believe it or not as you like, after Paul you are next closest to me in the world and I'd cut the throat of anyone else for your sake."

Diana believed that this was true, but it did not help her to stay. "Paul is very lucky to have married such a loyal wife," said Diana slowly and coldly. "I wonder whether he will always be worthy of such touching loyalty, Molly. You wonder it too, don't you?"

Diana had intended to say more, but was glad when a servant came to announce the arrival of a hired car. It was not until she had reached the privacy of her room at the Europe Hotel that she relaxed her iron self-control. Although knowing their futility, she gave way to the luxury of tears. After a brief orgy of self-pity, for which she despised herself, Diana resumed the poise and calm she

had forsaken. Fourteen days of miserable solitude lay ahead until the sailing of the ship to Port Mallet and for these she would need all her spiritual armour.

In order to save some harassed A.D.C. at Government House the embarrassment of withdrawing a dinner invitation from Their Excellencies a few days hence, Diana wrote a polite note excusing herself.

At a bookshop in the town she bought herself a pile of novels to while away the tedium of waiting. There was escape in the written word.

On the afternoon of the third day in the hotel, the servant who brought her tea-tray announced that Paul Hammond was waiting downstairs and wished to see her. "Tell the man that I do not wish to see him," said Diana. Five minutes later there came a tap on the door and Paul entered the room. His eyes were bloodshot and there was a wild look about him. "I had to see you, Diana, to tell you how bitterly I blamed I am. It's taken me all this time to get the truth out of Molly and now . . . I just don't know what to say to you except that I am sorry."

"Molly was sorry too, Paul. At least she said she was. Is that what brought you here?"

"No, Diana, it isn't. I want to know what really happened that night . . ."

"My dear Paul," said Diana lightly, "I imagine that by now it's the subject of common gossip everywhere in Singapore, and I'm sure that the accepted version would be far more entertaining than mine. So why bother?"

"I'm perfectly sure, Diana, that what people may be saying isn't the truth about what happened. I want the truth and when I've got it, I'm going to make Peregrine admit it publicly. I'll horsewhip him within an inch of his life . . ."

"What good would that do me, Paul? If Colin Peregrine swore on a stack of bibles that that night was perfectly innocent, do you think anyone—except you, perhaps—would believe him?"

"The swine has got to be punished . . ."

"He will be, Paul, without any help from you. You're not God. Did Molly by any chance tell you ?? I allowed myself to be trapped that evening. You must understand, Paul, and I say this in Molly's defence, that I knew perfectly well before I left your bungalow that evening that Molly didn't intend to bring you along to join the party."

"You *knew* that?" exclaimed Paul in blank amazement. "Then why, for God's sake, were you fool enough to go alone with Peregrine? You're not telling me that . . ."

"I fell for him? Is that it? No, Paul, I'm not such a little ninny as that."

"Then why did you go?"

"Because, Paul, I did not want to be the means of causing trouble between you and Colin. You and Molly had been very kind to me. That would have been a poor way of repaying you, that's all. Don't waste time looking for complicated reasons, for it's just as simple as that."

Paul closed his eyes, as though to shut out all the implications of what he had heard. "So," he said at length, "Molly really did sacrifice you like that! I couldn't believe it when she told me. I didn't think her capable of such a thing. . . ."

"Then you don't know much about your own wife, Paul. You'd better go back and learn. There's still time."

"I don't think," said Paul slowly, "that I ever want to speak to Molly again. And you, Diana, you did this for us . . . I don't know what to say."

"There isn't anything to say, Paul. Go back home and be thankful that you have a loyal wife, which many men can't boast. You're a very lucky man, Paul."

"But you, Diana, what about you?"

"My dear Paul," replied Diana with a little ripple of mirthless laughter, "since my sacrifice, as you choose to put it, was made for the express purpose of saving you and Molly from trouble, the least you can do is to accept the gift gracefully. Make your peace with Colin and, when you have done that and have safeguarded your income, go back home and make your peace with Molly. But"—Diana could

not resist the thrust—"in that order. The other way round might not be so easy."

"I don't blame you for being bitter," Paul said.

"I'm not bitter, Paul. I'm just realistic—like Molly."

Diana stood up in order to make it clear that the conversation was at an end, but as she turned towards the door Paul seized her in his arms, raining kisses on her mouth and eyes. It was useless to resist his sheer brute strength, so Diana did not try. She remained for many seconds cold and unresisting in Paul's arms until, through the fever which consumed him, he sensed her disgust. Then, ashamed of himself, he released her and sank into a chair.

A little devil perched himself upon Diana's shoulder, whispering to her of the sweetness of revenge. There would never be another chance to level the score with Molly, the realistic Molly, who had not hesitated, when the time came to put first things first, as she saw them. There was a certain poetic justice in it all. To protect her husband from his folly and to hold their home together, Molly, knowing full well what she was doing, had bought security at the cost of her best friend's reputation. Now Paul, feverish with what he believed to be love of that best friend, sat shamefacedly at hand. At a word from her, Diana knew, Paul would be at her feet, ready to abandon everything—including Molly. The voice of the little devil was persuasive and it was hard not to be influenced by it.

During the long minutes of silence which followed Paul's outburst and collapse, Diana knew that she hated Molly for her betrayal, but cold reason came to her rescue. Molly had never deceived her. She had known perfectly well *before* going off alone with Peregrine that Molly had no intention of joining them. True, she had been betrayed, but she had allowed herself to be betrayed, preferring to pay the high price she had paid rather than be a means of bringing trouble to Paul and Molly. For Diana now to allow her hatred of Molly to bring about the very situation which her betrayal had averted would, as she began to see it, be a wanton thing, for it would mean that her reputation would have been lost.

for nothing. Worse still, it would mean that she *was* what she was fighting to believe that she *was not*, a means of bringing unhappiness and trouble to those with whom she came in contact. It would mean that Father Courtenay and his sister, Mother Ursula, had been right and that she was condemned to walk calmly through life, while all around her raged storms of human passion.

A tap on the door brought an abrupt end to Diana's tortured thinking. A Chinese servant handed her a tray on which reposed a pencilled note. It was from Molly Hammond. It said: "May I come up?" Diana nodded assent and the servant disappeared on his errand.

In the half-light behind closed shutters Molly Hammond did not see her husband, slumped in the chair "Paul has left me, I think, Di. Have you seen him?" Molly looked ghastly. Even in the dimness of the room, Diana could see the havoc wrought by weeping "I know I deserve it, Di, but don't take him from me."

Diana, knowing it was for the last time, looked searchingly at her erstwhile friend, trying vainly to find pity. "I don't want him, thanks," she said coldly, nodding in Paul's direction "There he is. You can't take him away too quickly for me. I give him to you. I've the right to do that, haven't I? I bought him—bought and paid for him—with my reputation. He's yours now, Molly, yours and Colin Peregrine's... and now get out, both of you, before I change my mind."

VIII

THIS was the first time Diana had ever stayed alone in a large hotel. She hoped it would be the last. It was necessary to take a book in to meals in order to have something on which to concentrate, so as to avoid the persistent looks of invitation which men cast in her direction. Men she had met socially, whose conduct had always been impeccably

courteous, sent silk notes to her table and to her room, the tone of which tacitly acknowledged her new status of fallen woman. More than one of them mentioned sums of money. Diana knew that women were merciless to women, especially to those more beautiful and desirable than themselves, but she was discovering that men, for all their vaunted chivalry, were in a way more cruel. The malice of women contained the seeds of envy and was, therefore, by implication, complimentary and flattering. The malice of men was more brutal. By male standards, Diana now realised, she had forfeited all the privileges of her sex. One man, they believed, had enjoyed her favours, which gave all other men the sacred right not only to prevent her from redeeming herself, but to kick her further down the social ladder.

It was as well that Diana could not see Colin Peregrine these days, basking happily in the glory of his conquest. He was, of course, far too much the little gentleman to admit the soft impeachments he heard on every side at the bars of his clubs. "My dear chap, please don't suggest any such thing," he would say on these occasions with a correct bow. "The whole thing was most damnably unfortunate. Paul and Molly Hammond never got the message I left for them at the Yacht Club and then, by God! we had an engine breakdown."

"What did you do all night?" some wag would ask.
"Play tiddlywinks?"

"If you really want to know," Peregrine would reply, hugging to himself the supreme joke that what he was saying was the cold sober truth. "I made up a bunk in the cabin for Miss Maynard and got sopping wet myself outside. There was the hell of a dew. And I'd take it very kindly of you fellows to accept that as the gospel fact it is. For myself I don't care a curse what you or anyone else thinks. I'm only thinking of the poor girl. She's as sore as a boil with me, of course, and I can't say that I blame her."

Could the highest code of chivalry have demanded that a man do more? When his version of the night's events was

greeted with hoots of derision—as it invariably was—Peregrine would walk away looking very uncomfortable.

The A.D.C. at Government House, dreading the talk of withdrawing Their Excellencies' invitation to the notorious Miss Maynard, heaved a sigh of relief when the Private Secretary handed him her letter. But neither he nor anyone else saw anything inconsistent in the fact that Colin Peregrine was the life and soul of the party. That he had the morals of a stud bull—a fact as well known in Singapore as the name of Sir Stamford Raffles—and that in his company the reputation of a young and beautiful and charming woman had been ruined irretrievably, added to, rather than detracted from, his social standing, in the eyes of people who would have been horrified at the thought of accepting Diana.

All of which proves something.

Diana's spirits were at a low ebb, but she was able to take comfort in the thought that the law of compensation—whose existence she believed implicitly—would begin before long to operate in her favour. Good and evil, light and darkness, joy and sorrow were, she believed, balanced with all the accuracy of a pair of micrometric scales. It was a cold doctrine, but it helped Diana at a time when there was little comfort to be derived elsewhere.

There was comfort, too, in the belief that she had laid her own private ghost. Some three days after her final interview with the Hammonds, chance took her past the country club one evening by rickshaw. As she passed the gate a car emerged. In it, all on excellent terms with one another, laughing gaily at some witticism, were Paul and Molly Hammond with Colin Peregrine and some woman unknown to Diana. Here—and Diana hugged the knowledge to herself—was the proof that the stormy presence of Diana Maynard had wrought no harm to the Hammonds or to Paul's partnership. To believe herself possessed of some maleficent influence on others was nonsensical, so the misery of these last days had not been endured for nothing. Diana was able to return to her lonely hotel room with a light heart.

made even lighter by a letter which was waiting her.
It read:

Dear Diana:

"This is a letter about nothing in particular, unless it is to let you know that you are missed. This isn't just politeness. You really are missed. By me, of course, but by others also, some of them quite surprising. One of these is Chow-li. Every time I see him, he asks if there is news of you. "When Missie left," he says, "the sun went behind a cloud."

Father Courtenay, for whom I handle a few business matters, called in to see me today. He asked whether I had heard from you. I told him that I had not, but that I intended writing to you. He then asked me to tell you that he prays for the "backsliding but beautiful Miss Maynard." Dr McCloskey also asks to be remembered to you. Speaking of you, he said "She is a biological freak. The mathematical odds against such beauty and intelligence being embodied in the same person are roughly equivalent to those against a Shetland pony winning the Grand National." He adds that Jimmie is well and constantly asking when you will return.

As to what I feel, I do not want to say too much in a letter, because I do not want to bore or irritate you. I suspect that long declarations of love (nobody ever makes them to me) must be very boring unless one feels the same way I am, of course, terribly in love with you, as you must know. But I also *like* you enormously and it is my liking rather than my love which prompts this letter.

There is only one item of real news here. Adrian has left. Nobody knows when he went exactly, but they say in the bazaar that he left in a fishing boat late one night shortly after you sailed. There may be no connection between the two events, but I have an uncomfortable feeling that there is. I nearly decided not to tell you, but felt that I should. I hope, poor chap, that he goes back to England and has his face fixed up. Otherwise, I feel he is finished.

There is one more piece of news. We are having a race meeting at the end of next month. I hope you will get back for it. The thought occurs to me that you might like to ride. Under our local rules you would get a 7-lbs. allowance, whatever you rode, and you would not go short of a good mount.

I am working very hard and, in my small way, prospering. This in itself worries me, because I realise that I can never ask you to bury yourself here. I know I have not the smallest right to include you in my dreams, but the trouble is that I cannot exclude you. Without you, the future has no meaning for me. I suppose I am being very foolish, but I just can't help it.

Enjoy yourself and sometimes, if you can, spare a kind thought for me.

Your devoted,
JOHN

The letter had a bitter-sweet reaction upon Diana. It was good to know that there were in the world decent, straight men like John, even if they were not tremendously exciting. He was the kind of man who could be trusted. Her liking for him was real and she wished, a little wistfully, that her liking could turn to love. A woman who shared her life with John Hudd would feel safe against all the predictable things. It might not be an exciting life, but there would be many compensations.

The events which lay over the horizon of time, Diana believed, could be left to look after themselves. Until men could understand the pattern of the future, it was foolish to plan the future. With youth, health and beauty as her birthright, to begin planning for the autumn of life was, as Diana saw things, to turn her back upon the gay and splendid possibilities of the present and immediate future. Youth had within it the seeds of its own destruction, the fierce and exultant flame that burned away the brief years of its duration before the curtain of oblivion fell. Youth, its passions and its anguish, were the only realities. Infancy was

the preparation and old age the aftermath as the ashes cooled. The moment to pluck the rose was the brief moment of its perfection and Diana believed, implicitly, to pluck it a moment too soon or too late was to destroy its sweetness beyond recall.

There might come a time when she would think otherwise of John Hudd, but now she believed that he had not the power to kindle in her the flames of wild ecstasy which she felt herself entitled to ask from life. Perhaps, Diana mused grimly, when the dirty tale which was bound to drift over to Fort Mallet reached John's ears, he would feel otherwise. She hoped so in a way, because if he could come to believe that he had had a narrow escape from a dangerous female, the pain of his longings would be eased. Nevertheless, even as Diana turned this over in her mind, she realised how much she valued his good opinion and how much it would sadden her to lose it.

The news about Adrian Hornby was disturbing. Diana hoped that he had in fact gone back to England to submit to the skill of a surgeon who, in giving Adrian a normal face again, might help him back to a normal mind. But somehow there lingered the uncomfortable feeling that this was not so. His was another ghost which had to be laid.

The hotel was unusually gay that evening. Two large mail boats, one from Yokohama, via Shanghai and Hongkong, and another outward bound for the same ports, were in the harbour. Diana went down to the terrace lounge earlier than was her habit. It would be pleasant, she decided, to sip a drink and see some fresh faces. For some reason she could not explain, she felt more cheerful than she had felt at any time since leaving the Hammond's bungalow and it was with a sense of expectancy that she went downstairs and found a quiet table where she could see everything, but where she herself was screened by potted palms. On the street, immediately below the terrace, a Chinese magician was performing his tricks and reaping a rich harvest of coins for his pains. A trick which completely mystified Diana and most of the other spectators was performed with

a crude flute from which, even while he was playing it, he extracted a number of articles, including an old shirt. Since the flute was obviously too young to have contained them, of the things which emerged, the general opinion was that they were drawn from his mouth through the flute. Diana's speculations on the subject came to an abrupt end when from behind her chair a familiar voice said: "To find you here is like finding a rose blooming in the desert. I am the happiest man in all Singapore—perhaps even the whole world."

Diana turned to see Jules Duvivier who, as though they had been friends for years, flung his arms round her and kissed both her cheeks. Instead of resenting this from a man of whom she knew almost nothing and with whom she had danced for a couple of hours on one evening of her life, there was something about the mode of greeting which to Diana seemed right and proper. Furthermore, she was quite sure, after the dreary loneliness of the past days, that she had never been so glad in her life to see anyone.

Jules Duvivier, it transpired over a bottle of champagne, had just arrived in Singapore in that most delightful of ships, the *Melchior Treub* from Belawan Deli, in Sumatra, after an adventurous and highly successful trip to Achin, the extreme northernmost tip of Sumatra. Although the Dutch had poured out blood and treasure for nearly a century, they had never been able to subjugate the Achinese people entirely. Partly because they wanted to avoid 'incidents' and also because they did not like the rest of the world to know how lightly their rule lay upon the remote Sultanate, the Dutch had forbidden Jules Duvivier to make the journey. But he had made it and had returned with "pearls which are so beautiful that my father will dance three times round the Place Vendôme."

"How long are you staying in Singapore?" asked Diana.

"For as long as you are staying here," was the reply.

"Where will you go to from here?"

"Wherever you are going, I shall follow. I have reproached myself a hundred times for leaving you in that

the prep-
cooled, Port Mallet, but now that Fate has led me to you
of us, I shall not permit you to escape. Jules Duvivier
it is yes that when Fate leads him down a road, he must
know to the end. Do not doubt that it was Fate. I caught
the ship with five minutes to spare. I arrived at Raffles
Hotel, where I always stay, to find that the hotel was full.
Come here . . . and I find you. How can you be so foolish
as to doubt that it was Fate?"

"But I don't doubt it," replied Diana laughingly. "I
haven't been able to get a word in edgeways. Anyway, I'm
awfully glad to see you, Monsieur Duvivier. I have grown
very tired of my own company in these last days."

"I always knew the English were barbarians. That you
have been lonely is the proof of it. Also, I refuse to be called
Monsieur Duvivier. That is an honour reserved for my
parent. You will please call me Jules and I shall call you
Diana, or if you do not mind, I prefer the French of it.
You shall be Diane. But"—there was concern in his eyes
now—"you are unhappy, Diane. What is the matter? Some-
one has been unkind to you. I see it clearly. Not long since
you have wept. Would it please you if I kill someone for
you?"

"No, Jules, I don't think so. It is true that I have been very
unhappy, but just now I would rather not talk about it.
Please make me laugh this evening, Jules. I have almost
forgotten how to laugh."

"Go now to your room," urged Jules. "Put on your
prettiest gown and then we will dine and drink some more
champagne and—if we can find anything for laughter—we
will laugh until the dawn comes up. Otherwise, let us talk.
Me, I have not been so silent for years as I have been these
last weeks. I do not speak Malay and it was necessary to do
my business with sign language . . . so now I want to talk
until there is no more talk in me, and you, Diane, shall talk
a little sometimes also."

SINGAPORE, for all its importance as a seaport and its vaunted position as 'the melting pot of the Far East,' was and very likely still is, an extremely dull town, especially for those with a taste for sophisticated night life. For the Chinese, the Malays and the Tamils there was everything, from clandestine gambling hells, all-night restaurants and clubs, to bordellos whose tariffs ranged all the way from a few coppers to sums within reach of only the very rich. For the dominant Anglo-Saxon there was nothing except the stilted and synthetic gaiety afforded by the two leading hotels which were usually dead by midnight. The adjective 'prim' best describes the entertainment afforded.

By contrast with the roaring, wide open life of Saigon, the international cities of the China Coast and the river ports, Singapore had nothing to offer.

The bottle of champagne which Jules sent across to enliven the orchestra at the Europe failed of its purpose, for the cautious musicians, instead of drinking it, divided the cost among themselves and continued their dreary, rhythmless playing.

At Raffles Hotel things were little better, although proceedings were enlivened by a drunken Englishman who, on learning that Jules was a Frenchman, wanted to fight him because of some obscure incident which had occurred in Rouen in 1916. "But, my friend," said Jules good-humouredly, "after what you English did to Jeanne d'Arc at Rouen, are you surprised?"

"She got what was coming to her!" was the surly reply, punctuated by two loud hiccoughs.

"I am told," said Jules, leading Diana away, "that in all Singapore there is one place where it is not forbidden to be gay. It is not *chic*, but there will be laughter."

Jules, Diana had occasion to note with pleasure during the next fifteen minutes, behaved in exactly the same way in a taxicab as he did elsewhere, in sharp contrast to most of

the men with whom she had ever shared one. She felt a little foolish, but she did not want to offend him, so she said as far as possible against him. "I am not so wise about women," she said; "Have no fear, Diane. Jules Duvivier will behave himself most correctly. With him you will always be safe—in a taxi. Little men who when the taxi door shuts, think they are Casanova, are not nice. There are many places where you must never trust Jules Duvivier, but in a taxi, Diane, you will always be safe."

"I think, Jules, that you are a very dangerous man. You know far too much about women and I do not believe that you learned it from a book."

"I am not so wise about women, Diane. I am only wise about pearls, and to learn about pearls I went to the oyster. I look at you and I see around your neck pearls which are not pearls. I am shocked. Your skin was made for pearls and yet"—he made the gesture of allowing something to drop between this thumb and forefinger—"you wear this—this rubbish from Japan. You will please do something for Jules," he continued, expertly unfastening the string of cultured pearls she was wearing. "You will wear these for me."

From the breast pocket of his dinner jacket, Jules Duvivier brought out another rope of pearls which, in the dim light Diana was unable to see properly. A moment later, with fingers which did not falter or fumble, he had fastened their clasp at the back of her neck.

"Hush!" he said, stifling her protest with a hand placed gently over her mouth. "Do not speak, I beg you. It is I, Jules, who will speak. These pearls are not a gift. As a small pleasure for me, I ask you to wear them. They are sick pearls. Once they were lovely like a dream and, if you will wear them for a little while, they will again be lovely. Pearls, Diane, were made for such as you. It is for you the oysters perform their small miracles at the bottom of the sea, for yours is the skin which can heal sick pearls. My mother was another. That, she insisted, was why my father married her. Every night of her married life my mother

went to bed wearing pearls next to her skin, sick pearls which needed her magic touch to have that magic and you, Diane, will do the same and heal the sick pearls for Jules."

Whatever form Diana's protests 'might have taken' they were brought to nothing by the taxi's arrival at their destination, which turned out to be a garishly-lit café, rejoicing in the name of *Chez Hortense*. The proprietress, a gigantic *parisienne*, was, despite some fifteen years spent as the madame of a brothel in Saigon, a woman of tremendous respectability. Bad language—in any language which she understood, and she spoke nine fluently—was banned in her establishment. Her clientèle was drawn to a large extent from amongst the non-English-speaking Europeans of Singapore and from the officers of the Messageries Maritimes ships which used Singapore as a port of call on their way to and from the China Coast. Here were to be found good wines at half the prices charged for bad ones at the leading hotels, a complete range of the aperitives so dear to French palates, and for those who appreciated such things, there was always a fairy-light omelet, or a dish of *rognons sautés au madere*. Observing, from her low prices and the fact that most of her clients were poor people, that Madame Hortense could not possibly make the establishment pay, the Singapore police had for some time assumed the café was a cloak for other things. But whatever their suspicions, the most careful watching had failed to reveal the existence of anything illegal.

Diana and Jules, clad in evening attire, the former wearing her superb gown of Chantilly lace in spider's web design, stood out in contrast to the rest of the café's patrons, who were clad for the most part in white duck suits which should have gone to the laundry the day previously.

Madame Hortense received Jules like a long-lost friend, although she knew him only from a couple of previous visits. She liked his smiling good looks, no less than the fact that he was a compatriot, but more than all she liked his and Diana's appearance. Madame Hortense had always

been a stickle for the conventions and, despite the heat, nobody had ever seen her in this evening unless clad in the tight-fitting, black satin gown she always wore. She unbuttoned somewhat to Diana when the latter spoke to her in excellent French. Jules's blank astonishment at this was quite ludicrous. "You did not tell me that you spoke French," he said, looking delighted beyond measure. "You did not ask me," replied Diana.

"It is well," he said soberly in his own tongue, "because there are so many things I would like to say to you, things which cannot be said in English. It is true, madame, is it not," he said, turning to Madame Hortense, who was an interested listener, "that no matter how well a Frenchman speaks another language, there are some things which will never express themselves, save only in our beautiful French?"

Madame Hortense nodded her agreement to this.

"Then," said Diana gaily, "if monsieur says things which I do not understand, madame, I shall ask you to interpret them for me."

"The things which monsieur will say to you, mademoiselle, even if he were to utter them in Chinese or Russian, will have a meaning so plain that you will have no need of an interpreter. Some of them—who knows—may even prove to be true. If you listen well, mademoiselle, the look of sadness will go from your eyes . . . for they will be the kind of things best said in whispers and if they are said sweetly enough, for a little time they become true. If you will not listen, mademoiselle, then tie a bandage round his eyes and let him say them to me. . . ."

In one corner of the *café* two men were playing dominoes as they sipped their coffee and brandy. Three young officers from a French ship were laughing round a bottle of Pernod. At the grand piano, seemingly sunk in gloom, sat a drunken Hollander, swaying slightly on the stool as he dragged improvised chords from the keys. His cigarette lay in a deep groove at the right-hand side of the keyboard, where countless other pianists had rested their cigarettes. A young

woman who wore a battered and defeated look sat alone at a side table, taking small sips from a glass of vermouth, glancing frequently at the clock above the service bar, where two Chinese boys stood rolling poker dice for small change.

There was nothing much to distinguish the café from a thousand like it, scattered throughout the world's seaport cities, but Diana, to whom it was a novelty, liked its friendly informality, the smell of French cigarettes and even Madame Hortense herself. Diana had always believed that if she could get to know them, she would love the French. She had learned French in the bosom of a ferociously respectable family in Dijon, where she had been sheltered from all contacts except a few pedantic spinsters whose knowledge and use of the subjunctive was quite overpowering.

Jules bought champagne for everyone. The popping of the first cork awoke the pianist, who had slumped forward across the keys. To his accompaniment the three young officers sang *Madelon*, followed by another song which they parodied so indelicately in the *patois* of Marseille, which happily Diana did not understand, that Madame Hortense wagged a warning finger at them.

It was not often that such distinguished clients came down to visit Madame Hortense's establishment and she was determined that nothing was going to be said or done which might cause them to repent the visit. Also, aside from the fact that he spent money freely, she liked Jules, wondered who he was and why he and his elegantly-gowned young woman were passing the evening here instead of at one of the fashionable hotels.

Diana wondered about nothing. She was too happy. After the starchy formality of the other side of Singapore, where the table of precedence among petty officials and their wives was considered to be vastly more important than the Thirty-nine Articles of the Christian Faith, the change was refreshing. The music and the laughter and the champagne conspired between them to make serious thinking impossible. It seemed, somehow, the right setting for Jules's extravagant compliments and prevented the hot avowals which,

Diana sensed, were hovering upon his lips. She did not want to hear them, only murmur and sing as though there were never going to be a tomorrow. When in the early hours of the morning they finally left, they walked out into the cool air, to the tune of the *Bridal Chorus*. It had been a foolish evening. It would have horrified all her respectable friends if—Diana paused to reflect—she still had any.

The anticlimax arrived when the nighthawk puller of a double rickshaw dropped them back at the Europe Hotel, the sight of which revived for Diana the miseries of the past days of loneliness and distress.

"Thank you for some happy hours, Jules," she said sadly as they parted to go their respective rooms.

X

HAPPINESS, in Diana's philosophy, was like butter. It could be spread thin over a vast number of slices of bread, or it could be eaten in chunks on a very few. For five days she had been absurdly happy and these five days were now entered irrevocably on the credit side of life's ledger. The butter had been spread thickly.

They had been foolish, childish days. Two of them had been spent swimming and sailing on the Johore side of the narrow strait which divided Singapore from the mainland of Malaya. She and Jules had played tennis, which he played well, and golf, which he played so badly that it was not true. They had swum, lazed and laughed away the happy hours. One evening Madame Hortense had prepared a special dinner for them, while on another they had dined aboard the *Messageries Maritimes* mail boat, where everyone seemed to know and like Jules and where the Captain, a sturdy Breton with twinkling blue eyes, paid Diana extravagant compliments.

Jules, looking perfectly fresh at seven o'clock in the morning, although he had only gone to bed four hours

previously, was sitting waiting for Diana when she came down for breakfast. ~~He~~ ~~had~~ ~~been~~ ~~about~~ he insisted, was a barbarous habit, "but to sit long in say a room where I might be with you, Diane, is worse than barbarous—it is foolish."

As Diana approached the table, Jules was frowning at telegram he had just opened, but as she took her seat, stuffed it into his pocket and behaved as though nothing had happened. A chill settled round her heart as she wondered whether this would bring to an end the happy, careless day she and Jules were spending together.

An hour later, with a fresh breeze sending them scudding over blue water, it was easier to forget the future in the exhilaration of the present. Even the sharks which cruised hopefully alongside the cutter had no power to mar the day.

The only sounds to disturb thought were the sighing of the breeze and the ripple at the cutwater. It was a day which made clear thinking possible. Just what, Diana asked herself, did this man Jules Duvivier mean to her? What sense of loss would be left behind when in a few days at most, either by her own departure for Port Mallet, or his for another destination, he should be plucked out of her life, probably for ever? She knew very little of this man, almost nothing beyond the fact that he was a gay companion, a charming and considerate host, and stood in awe of nobody except, perhaps, the father who awaited his return in the sombrely magnificent premises on the *Place Vendôme*.

Diana tried to conjure up a picture of life without Jules Duvivier, but her imagination balked at the bleak vista she saw. In this negative and roundabout fashion she began to realise that her feelings for this comparative stranger were utterly new in her experience. Was this, she wondered, a mere passing infatuation, or had she, in the misused and overworked phrase, 'fallen in love'? Love, if this were it, was too beautiful and precious a thing to be cheapened by association with the spurious sentiments of the clap-trap sentimental ballads. Even to herself, Diana hesitated to use the word until certainty became crystallised.

Early that morning Diana looked at herself in a mirror

and the thought had come to her that the beauty she saw reflected there was a cold and unfeeling. It had never brought her the happiness it had once promised. Instead, it had created most of the problems of her short life. Too often, lured by her fresh beauty, Diana had seen the eyes of other women go hard. Often she had flinched from the gaze of men whose eyes had clouded with lust, heavy-lidded, greedy, evil. That same beauty had brought Jules.

With Jules it was different. When he looked at her his eyes seemed to sparkle, as though they were reflecting points of light from a flickering fire. The eyes never lost their gay good-humour. There was frank admiration to be read in them, pure friendliness and an ardency which was no more like lust than—Diana paused for a simile—than the frost on a Christmas tree was like the real thing.

Her heart racing like mad with sheer excitement, Diana believed she had made the greatest and most wonderful discovery of her life.

There had been so little happiness, real happiness. There had, it was also true, been very little real unhappiness. Life for Diana had in the main been pleasant enough but, she mused, the same might be said for cows, which were content to chew the cud and, probably, felt nothing too acutely. Happiness, she knew, was not merely the absence of misery. Happiness, in the true sense of the word, meant intense joy in living and it was something which could not be achieved alone, unless it were attained by a few rare souls who lived the contemplative life. The gratification of lust did not spell happiness, but the symphony of happiness, she believed, was not complete without the vibrant notes plucked from tingling senses and nerves drawn taut with ecstasy. There was no escape from the conclusion—even had Diana wished to escape from it—that sex was an important ingredient. Everything, it seemed, resolved itself down to the simple formula of a man and a woman and the spark which sprang from their meeting.

“Jules,” said Diana suddenly, “what was in that telegram?”

"I, also, was thinking of that, Diane. The ~~te~~ ^{that} happened to me to Padang, in Sumatra. My father there has found these for which my father has been searching for years. They ^{the} complete the most perfect necklace ever made."

"When must you go, Jules?"

"Tomorrow, Diane. The *Rumphius* sails in the morning for Belawan Deli. I must sail in her."

"The clock will soon strike twelve and the party will be over. I am glad I wept for Cinderella when I was a little girl, because I know now how she must have felt."

An outward-bound ship passed the cutter, leaving her rolling in the wash. Diana projected her mind ahead to the following morning, trying to capture in imagination what her own feelings would be as she watched Jules grow smaller until his outline merged into anonymity with the people who were thronging the rail of his ship. The mind-picture she conjured up told her all she wanted to know. The sense of desolation which swept over her told her that what she felt for Jules must be the elusive thing called love.

Am I capable of lying to him and cheating him? Diana asked herself. She shook her head. Could I look at another man if Jules were with me? She laughed at the thought. Would I die for him? Soberly, Diana believed she would. The last test she applied to herself seemed quite conclusive. Diana tried to imagine any other man but Jules being the father of her children and the thought was so repulsive that she thrust it hurriedly from her.

Then Diana's mood brightened. All she needed to know now was what Jules felt for her and she believed she knew. It was strange, nevertheless, that he had said nothing, for Jules was not a bashful man.

Diana had never used coquetry as a weapon. It had never been necessary for one thing, and for another, she had never felt impelled to go even half-way towards a man. Now, however, it was different. Somehow, she resolved, before the sun set she would make Jules declare his love for her, always provided—she froze at the doubt—he loved her.

During the next two hours Diana discovered that coquetry

and the thoracic kind—had to be learned, like everything else, by the cutter, and she fell into Jules's arms, her thin wedding-trimmed fingers clutching efficiency, Jules descending quickly in the cockpit. At lunch, which they ate in silence in the lee of an island, she behaved coyly and would have been prepared to go on like this until sundown had not Jules begun to bellow with laughter.

"It is not necessary to make all that monkey business, Diane, in order that I shall want to marry you. One half-hour after Chow-li introduced us I decided to marry you, Diane. I thought you knew that. But then, you see, I thought we would wait until it was time to return to France, because it would make my father very happy to meet you and to be present when we are married. But, Diane *chérie*, I do not think I can wait so long as that. . . ."

"Jules, Jules, why did you allow me to make such a fool of myself?" said Diana between laughter and tears.

"Because I wanted to see how skilful you were. That is all. If you had been too skilful, *chére*, then I might have changed my mind. But you were not at all skilful. It was done so badly that I could do better myself. You, for example, with the poise and the balance of a ballet dancer, why should you fall twice into my arms like a sack of beans? No, Diane, I am a most simple man, but not so simple as that."

After that, nothing seemed to matter, nothing, that is, until Diane remembered that tomorrow morning Jules would be gone. "The time is so short, Jules," said Diana when sanity had returned to her. "There are plans to be made . . ."

"We cannot be married in Singapore, Diane, without some weeks of delay. My lawyer has enquired into the matter. Also, because I am French and because—who knows—I may have another wife hidden away in France, there must be papers. It would seem best, *cherie*, if you go back to Fort Mallet to your brother's house and there take out the papers for marriage. Then, when I leave Sumatra, I will come there to join you."

All that Diana's mind could focus upon was that happiness, which had been the chief source of her happiness during these last days, was being snatched away. She did not believe that she could face more days alone in the hotel and the gauntlet of insulting eyes every time she left her room. Fond as she was of her brother, she dreaded the thought of return to Fort Mallet and the cramped life around Le Green. But what, she asked, was the alternative? There was another problem to be faced now: Jules had to be told the sorry tale of Colin Peregrine and her own loss of caste in the eyes of Singapore society. Since further delay would not make this easier, Diana launched at once into the story, telling it without addition or subtraction. What made it easy was Jules's unquestioning acceptance of every word. She did not believe she could have borne the sight of doubt in his eyes. ". . . and so, you see, Jules," Diana concluded, "why I am not very happy at the thought of remaining here alone."

Jules offered no comment. He accepted everything she had said as the unvarnished truth it was. "Tell me," he said at length, "would the thought of being married in a Roman Catholic Church be very terrible to you?"

"Why should it, Jules? I was brought up as a Roman Catholic and, although it does not mean anything much to me today, it would be the natural place if you, also, are a Catholic. . . ."

"For me also, Diane, it means little, but I think it would give great pleasure to my father if we were to be married in Paris from his house. But, I warn you, nothing less than a Monsignor would satisfy him. It would be at one of the great churches. All the Duvivier family, which is happily scattered over France, would have to be invited . . . and there would be bridesmaids whose gowns would come from Worth or Paquin, and everyone would have to wear dark glasses because of the diamonds he would hang on them for the ceremony. I know my father, you see, but it would make him very happy if you can face it."

"I think I could face anything, Jules—with you. But all this doesn't help us decide what is to be done—now."

Over the next minutes there was a heavy silence, while Diana slowly reached the conclusion that the best solution of the difficulty would be for them to go to Sumatra together and thence sail for France. She looked at Jules, wondering whether she should say what was in her mind, when she became aware that he already knew. A subtle thought transference had taken place and Diana knew a tremendous surge of gratitude for the quick perceptions of this man she was going to marry. Before he opened his mouth to speak, she knew that Jules was going to say for her—as though it were entirely his idea—what she had decided.

"After what you have told me, Diane," he began, "I think it better that you do not remain alone in Singapore. It is better that you come with me to Sumatra. If the Dutch authorities will allow us to marry at short notice, we will be married there. But I do not think so, Diane. They are *très formaliste* in such matters, so it may be that we would have to go on to France together. Also, Diane," he added slowly, "I am a man who keeps a promise when he has made it, but it is better that I should tell you now that I cannot promise that until we are married I will behave myself with perfect correctness. I will promise to try, Diane, but more than this—no, I cannot."

Diana's head was resting upon Jules's shoulder when she whispered: "It is right that you should try, Jules, but you need not try too hard."

XI

At the end of three days of hard bargaining with a shrewd Chinese merchant, who was able to sense something of the urgency of the buyer, Jules returned to the Hotel Hollandia in triumph, the possessor of seven rose-pink pearls which would complete one of the world's fabulous necklaces. The price was agreed a little before noon and before one o'clock

Jules and Diana, in a hired car, were driving out of the not very inspiring town of Padang on Sumatra's west coast. The way led across the coastal plain towards the mountains. In the late evening, on the shore of a vast lake shimmering in the moonlight, the car came to a halt beside a tiny wooden structure which called itself an hotel.

A smiling Javanese boy, advised by telegram that guests were coming, produced a stewed chicken, some sweet potatoes and some canned brussels sprouts, followed by thin slices of Dutch cheese and a dish of fruit. Jules and Diana ate hungrily and in silence. On leaving Padang all that Diana had known of their destination was that, to quote Jules, "tomorrow morning you will wake up to find yourself very near to Paradise."

Waking with the dawn and looking at Jules sleeping peacefully beside her, Diana went out on to a flimsy wooden balcony to take deep gulps of the cool morning air which, after the dank humidity of the coast, tasted like champagne. She became acutely aware as she stood there, watching while the daily miracle of dawn unfolded itself, that now and for the first time in her life, she was utterly and completely happy. Singapore and the ugly things which had happened there were no more than a bad dream, receding into the distance, as unreal as the darkness which was giving way to light. Her mind was crystal clear, unclouded by doubt. She exulted in a sense of physical well-being and fulfilment.

The years of indecision were gone. They now took on the aspect of a period of preparation. It was as though time had been passed in the ante-room of life and that Jules had thrown open for her the doors of life itself.

The almost horizontal rays of the sun picked out the sail of a fishing boat, motionless in the dawn calm, while across the silent water came the cry of an infant, distorted in the mist and sounding close at hand. The cry awoke Jules, who came out sleepily on to the balcony. To Diana it seemed better that they should face the new day together.

A minute later, clad in minimal swim suits, they were

poised at the end of a wooden jetty below which, in smoke-blue water of incredible depth, a school of fish fled from their shadows. Diane swam quickly above the water without a splash; Jules, clumsy by comparison, followed her, splashing along in her wake and envying the effortless ease with which she drove through the water.

"We are lucky people," said Jules gravely at breakfast, "because we have all this beauty for ourselves. Soon—it cannot be delayed long—ugly crowds will discover this lake. Travel agents all over the world will be selling this beauty which is ours for nothing. On the point over there someone will build a luxury hotel. On the flat land behind there will be a golf course. Old men and fat women will play bridge, motor launches will carry the noise and stink everywhere, and all the beauty will be destroyed by the same people who say that they come in search of beauty...."

"Where are we, Jules? You have not told me, you know. I am like a child who follows without question . . . and the funny thing is that I don't seem to mind."

"Have no fear, Diane. Jules will not lead you into danger. This lake is nearly fifty miles long and more than twelve broad. The people call it Toba and the Dutch mark it on their maps as Toba-meer. Over there"—Jules pointed to the loom of land on the horizon—"is the island of Pulau Samosir. It is a big island, nearly as big as Toba itself."

"How do you know all this, Jules? Have you been here before?"

"Two years ago, Diane, a strange thing happened. I was on the way from Medan to Padang, driving myself in a hired car. Suddenly at the top of a hill, in wild country, the engine stopped. I tried to make repairs, but it was useless. Then it was that a strange feeling came to me and I knew—it was so strong as that—I *knew* that at the bottom of the hill I would find something. I did not know what it would be, but I knew it would be something important—to me. My father always says, 'Obey the little voice, for the little voice speaks not often and it is the voice of wisdom.'

"So I obeyed the little voice. I climbed into the car, took off the brake and in a second I was on the road home. The car stopped right under this balcony. I was in no great hurry. The ship in which I was returning to Europe did not sail for more than two weeks, so I stayed here for a week. I left when an English couple and their child arrived here from Medan. I could not bear to share my paradise with anyone. The strange things had not finished happening. The mechanic who was to have come to repair the car did not come. I put my foot on the starter and—you will laugh—at once the motor started.

"It was the little voice which had led me here and the little voice is not wrong. On the last night I dreamed that I would return, but I did not know, Diane, that it would be with you. But even now, I know—yes, I *know*—that Toba is not finished with us. Something splendid, something so big will happen to us here. I knew it in the night. While you were sleeping beside me, the little voice spoke again."

"And what did the little voice say, Jules?"

"The little voice told me that we should never come here again. It told me that we should drink up the happiness which this place has for us so that there may never be any regrets . . . and now, the coffee is cold and there is much to do."

At about nine o'clock there arrived alongside the jetty a strange craft, poled in the shallows by two Battak men, who lived in a village on the lake shore nearby. It was not unlike a Thames barge, built with massive lee-boards for stability. A tattered wisp of sail hung limply from the mast. Amidships was a crude cabin. Its roof was palm-leaf thatch and its walls of finely made basket-work.

Marvelling at her own restraint, Diana watched while Jules superintended the men as they carried a bed, a table, some chairs, a charcoal cooking stove and other equipment into the boat, standing by until the cabin was arranged to his liking.

At high noon, when a brazen sun had burnished the surface of the lake, a tiny breeze crept down the mountains.

Taking the minimum of clothing with them, Diana and Jules boarded their craft and, pulling on the mooring ropes, allowed the breeze to pull them almost imperceptibly away from the land. There was not enough wind to provide steerage way, so it was waste of time trying to sail. Neither Diana nor Jules cared where or how they went, for they, like their floating home, were drifting helplessly, at the mercy of the tides of desire.

In the middle of the afternoon the breeze freshened. The crazy patchwork of the sail filled with wind to become, despite its tattered age, a thing of beauty. At barely walking speed, bows pointed to the distant island, the clumsy craft dipped her blunt nose from time to time and, like an old horse to whom the way is familiar, held her course.

When the setting sun was gilding the mountain tops and the valleys were filling with violet shadows, the wind dropped abruptly. The curtain of night fell upon a glassy calm.

Food had not seemed important all day. Lighting the charcoal stove, Jules busied himself with some small white onions, which he fried in butter, and a scrawny chicken. Before long the onions, the dissected chicken, a tin of mushrooms, some herbs and some red wine were simmering in an earthenware casserole, from which came such devastating smells that Diana was reminded of her hunger.

There was something laughable about the intent way in which Jules set about the task of preparing the evening meal. Diana reminded herself that he was a Frenchman and that it was dinner time, an occasion not to be treated lightly. For more than an hour, so intent had he been on his task, he had not spoken.

The velvety night somehow seemed to demand silence. Chatter would have struck a false note. They were now becalmed roughly half-way between the island and the mainland, out of the reach of sounds from either and, except for the occasional twinkling of a light, out of sight.

It was the dark of the moon. Wisps of mist, wraithlike and eerie, crept out of the darkness to twine themselves

around this im-
tude and the sile-
out.

Jules, his brow w₁
of an Escoffier, was li.
gravy time to cool, he
Searching by the light of
paper bag of herbs, from wh
chicken before replacing the li

“Jules,” said Diana in a sma.
have to be perfect? I’m very hun_z

There was reproof in his voice w₁
be perfect. That is where you are wro
tonight must be perfect . . . patience,
patience!”

Tortured by the savoury smells, Diana s
clothes and plunged into the limpid water, k₁
the magic circle of yellow light which shone fro₁
cabin. Under the influence of the enchanted nigh
thought processes became impossible. Reason and
not apply here. Time was just a word out of a dict.
having no meaning. Yesterday and tomorrow had no
dity, only today.

For the first time, too, there was an opportunity to assess
the changes which had been wrought during the few days
which had elapsed since leaving Singapore. The changes,
Diana realised, were in herself. They were changes which,
regarding them from a detached viewpoint, were incalcul-
able. The first was that, instead of being an individual, a
unit, she was half of two persons. Mathematically speaking,
perhaps, there had been no change. The horizon had shrunk.
A world which had seemed so large did not now extend
beyond the range of Jules’s voice, perhaps not even
beyond the reach of his arms. When contemplating love in
the abstract, Diana had never envisaged the surrender of
all individual thinking and planning and being. She had
thought of love as one might think of a clear varnish which
put the final finish on the wood of life, bringing out its

that love was
only existence.
independence of
~~and~~ always worn like
and foolish. The joy was
very essence ungencrous.
uld ever again look quite
e same outlines and colours,
and different meaning.

g new things about herself was
ed: "*Madame est servie.*"

n, which was delicious, it occurred
ow often in Anglo-French marriages
nce to food and the French preoccupa-
proved an insuperable barrier. She herself
a perfectly happy to have eaten a sandwich, or
d a can of something, but as she contemplated
or at such a meal, she laughed involuntarily.

s it that you find so funny?" asked Jules.

you should think it worth while going to all this
- to prepare a meal on a crazy boat in the middle of
- in Sumatra."

But what difference does it make *where* we are?" asked
Jules with complete logic, unable to see the point. "Dinner
is dinner, whether it is eaten on a lake or in the Champs
Elysées. Do you not like the way the chicken is prepared?"

"It's simply delicious, Jules. In fact, I don't remember
ever having eaten a chicken *en casserole* half as good. I sup-
pose it is," she went on lamely, wishing the subject had not
arisen, "that an Englishman would just have opened a tin
of sausages and would have been quite content with it."

"Would you have been content with it, *chérie*? That is all
that matters."

"No, Jules," replied Diana, telling him the first lie, "one
should not be content with anything less than perfection."

The look of blank horror on her companion's face
tempted Diana again to laughter, but she refrained. Here
she mused without bitterness, was just one more thing in

which for the future she must surrender her individuality to Jules, who had won her heart. "I am someone who hears laughter in chicken," she said.

"You are sweet to say such nice things about my poor chicken," said Jules thoughtfully, sipping the gravy, "but I fear I put just a little too much garlic. It is a pity. Garlic," he continued with the utmost gravity, "is like goodness in a woman: it should be there, but it should not be apparent."

Silence is negative, the absence of sound, but the silence abroad on the lake that evening became almost positive in its intensity. Wisps of white mist came out of the void, enfolding the boat in their gentle, impalpable arms. From somewhere not far distant came an earthy sweet perfume, not unlike that of frangipani, but gayer and less funereal. In the tense fragrance and stillness ordinary conversation seemed too banal.

Diana, looking across the table at Jules, limned softly in the lamplight, felt the impulse to talk about future plans. Womanlike, she wanted to know where they would live when they reached Paris and a score of other practical matters. But the words were still-born on her lips. These were moments of enchantment which might never be relived.

The silence between them endured for the best part of an hour until Diana, clad in a bath towel and naked from the waist up, touched the string of sick pearls she was wearing, realising with horror that she had been swimming in them before dinner.

"That is how pearls should be worn," said Jules, looking at her through half-closed eyes. "It is the tragedy of pearls that the best are worn by fat old women, or by women full of acid and envy, who can kill pearls. There are women to whom my father will not sell the finest pearls. He will not allow them to touch them. For such women, he says, there are diamonds, which are hard and which resist the acids."

"I don't like diamonds, Jules. I'm glad you don't, either. They are cruel stones and . . . somehow, when I see women loaded with diamonds, I have the feeling that they did cruel

things to obtain them. I'm afraid, Jules, that in some ways I shall be a disappointment to you. I can't, please, ever make me wealthy. I don't know why, Jules, but precious stones—most of them—frighten me. I wonder do you understand. It must seem wrong to you as jewels play such an important part in your life. . . ."

"Of course I understand, Diane. The *charcutier* does not not make his wife eat sausages."

The talk ran upon a score of subjects as these two sought to understand each other, laying bare, little by little, the secrets of the mind, always more deeply buried than the secrets of the body. When the desire to talk died like a damp squib, they went to bed.

There was no sleep that night for either of them. The fires of passion burned too fiercely for sleep. It was a night spent upon the razor edge which divides ecstasy from anguish. It was not until dawn was breaking that, gorged and surfeited with sensation, and with nerve ends which could endure no more torture, they fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion.

XII

For nearly two weeks, with the ramshackle boat as their only home, Jules and Diana explored Toba. On the island of Pulau Samosir they found an enchanting village, where the people were charming and helpful. Fish, eggs, fruits and vegetables could be had in abundance, sometimes for a few small coins, but mostly as freewill gifts. By day the village was a delight, but at nightfall droves of mosquitoes forced them to take refuge out on the open waters.

It was a time of calm. Very occasionally, and then only for a couple of hours, there would be a breeze. It was, therefore, in every sense of the phrase, a life of drifting. For two whole days and nights the boat lay becalmed almost half-way between the island and the mainland and it was not until well

into the third day, that ~~they~~ enabled Jules and Diana to put into a fishing village and eat the last scrap of food there.

To Diana it seemed as though all the old standards of what was important had vanished. The ordinary conventions became laughable survivals from some remote age. When they were hungry, they ate, provided there was something to eat. When there was no more wine and it did not seem worth-while brewing coffee or tea, they drank the water of the lake, sucking it in as they swam.

"One day, at Longchamps, or Auteuil," said Jules, "when you are looking very smart and most dignified, you will remember Toba and wonder why you were ever so foolish as to leave."

"And where will you be while I am wondering why I am so foolish?"

"Me, perhaps I shall still be here, Diane," replied Jules, his eyes suddenly becoming blank and inscrutable.

Something told Diana not to pursue this cryptic remark. To do so, she felt, would be to break the spell of enchantment, to invite the presence of the little devils of discontent.

Much of Diana's attitude of mind during these deliriously happy days and nights was conditioned by an almost superstitious fear that the gods would exact payment for so much delight. She sensed, too, that some such fear lay dormant in Jules. Sometimes, and very briefly, there seemed to be an expression of fear and perplexity in his eyes.

For the whole of one afternoon Jules sat, a writing-pad on his knee, writing what appeared to be a tremendously long letter. He went on writing until the shadows of the mountain tops were reaching out across the lake like the giant hand of destiny. That evening he talked a great deal about his father, for whom he had a great affection and admiration. Jules spoke wistfully.

"From the way you speak, Jules," said Diana, "you seem to fear that you will not see your father again. Is he ill?"

“No, my father enjoys good health.”

"How old is he, Jules?"

"My father will be sixty this year."

"Then, sir, I am sorry for you. In good health, you are worried."

"Perhaps, sir, perhaps. But one has strange feelings sometimes. Forgive me, Diane, for I see that I have made you sad and that is something I never wish to do."

Diana had never known Jules in this mood. Usually, he sparkled as though care played no part in his life, but now he was troubled, filled with foreboding. Was there, she wondered, something which his abnormally acute perceptions had caught, something which had escaped hers?

One early morning, before the sun had lifted the curtain of mist from the face of Toba, and while Diana was still rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, she felt Jules's fingers playing with the catch on the string of sick pearls which she wore night and day. Unresisting, she let him take them from her and shut them in a case.

From between layers of cotton in a cardboard box she watched Jules while he took out two pearl necklaces which, at a casual glance and to Diana's untutored eye, were similar.

"I have never given you a gift, Diane, not even the smallest. This," he said, holding out one of the necklaces, "was made for you. You must have it. I do not know its story. I bought it as it is in Saigon. If I had not met you, Diane, it might have gone to the mistress of a fat war profiteer. Of its kind I have never seen better."

On closer examination it revealed itself as two strands of rose-pink pearls, beautifully matched. The lower of the two strings, slightly larger, comprised forty-one pearls. The colour of the pearls distinguished it from the string of cultured pearls which John Hudd had pressed upon Diana as a gift, but in general design there was a strong similarity. When Diana had finished admiring her gift, Jules fastened them round her neck and stood back a little to feast his eye upon them and upon her. By now Diana's whole body was burned to a rich, warm brown which set off the pearls splendidly.

Using his thumbs and fingers as though they were a pair of tongs, Jules held the pearls in his hands. Diana recognised as he did so, the sudden, tragic, expression of distaste upon his face, dropped them into the lake.

A long silence followed the disappearance of the pearls. It was broken by Jules, who said: "The best is for you, Diane. I do not like to see you wear such rubbish."

"They were given to me, Jules. The young man who gave them could not afford anything better. I think they were given with a good heart, so I accepted them to please him. That is all. They mean more to you than they did to me, Jules, or you would not have troubled to drop them in the lake. . . . Forget them, Jules, for you have no need to be jealous."

"There is always need to be jealous, *chérie*. People speak of jealousy as though it were a crime. If I were not jealous of you, it would mean that I did not love you. But let us not talk of foolish things. . . ."

Diana rose from the bed and stood, mother naked, poised in the bows of the boat, remembering just as she was about to take the plunge, that she was wearing the pearls which had been given to her. As she fumbled with the catch, Jules said: "No, Diane, to please me, wear them."

Jules was first out of the water. As Diane climbed the steps with the water pouring off her and running in rivulets over the pearls, the slanting rays of the morning sun caught her lithe body with spearheads of golden light. Jules, standing back in rapt admiration, wore the kind of look which a man might wear after witnessing a miracle. It was some time before he spoke and when he did so there were tears in his eyes. "It is too much beauty, Diane, and I did not know there could be too much. Me, I have now seen everything."

ON the morning of the thirteenth day spent drifting aimlessly all over Toba, a chance wind which had sprung up during the night deposited the boat gently on a mudbank barely a hundred yards from its starting point. The aimless idyll might have continued for another week. Diana and Jules would have been content to remain longer at the whim of wind and current, but this involuntary return seemed to be the will of the elements. Without any discussion, therefore, they waded ashore and in the same casual fashion in which they had left, resumed occupation of their room in the hotel. Half an hour later, feeling strange in relatively civilised garb, they were eating breakfast on the balcony overlooking the lake.

Breakfast was a silent meal. The abrupt end to the vagabond freedom of the last two weeks, coupled with the knowledge that they had returned to the problems and compulsions of a world filled with intent people, required assimilation.

Small sums of money were owing to the primitive hotel and for hire of the boat. Mail and, perhaps, telegrams were piling up in the little town of Siantar, an hour or two distant by road. Mundane things suddenly became pressing.

They reached Siantar at noon. It was a pretty town serving a huge area of rubber land, its most surprising feature being a small, but excellent, hotel, which boasted fine linen, good silver and the kind of food, good without being first class, which the Swiss have established as international standard. The proprietor in fact turned out to be a Swiss.

After lunch, from the local correspondent of a British bank, Jules obtained money on a letter of credit. In the same office he and Diana studied the sailing list of Dutch and British ships, deciding upon one of the former which was due to leave Medan five days hence. To travel in a British ship meant returning to Singapore and this Diana

refused to do. She hoped with all her heart that she would never see Singapore again.

On the way back to Toba, Diane was oppressed by the imminence of crowded shipboard life, by contrast with the carefree idyll of the past two weeks. She tried to console herself with the thought that, once arrived back in Europe, there would be the joyous task of creating a home for Jules, but somehow the mind picture formed lacked definition. It was all nebulous and unconvincing, unsatisfying. "What a pity it is, Jules," she murmured, "that we can't stay on Toba—for ever."

"That is foolishness, Diane," replied Jules reprovingly. "Happiness such as we have had must always be brief. I do not think we could endure it for a long time. It would be like the folly of a singer who tries to hold a high note too long. We have already crowded a hundred years of happiness into two weeks . . . and now, Diane, we must become a little reasonable."

There was comfort in the more mature philosophy of Jules. Diana felt it at once. Jules had a strange effect upon her, for everything he said had such a reasonableness that it stilled her vague fears. Probably, she mused, he was right in this, too. There *were* other kinds of happiness.

"My grandfather and my grandmother were happy to the end, Jules," she told him. "When they were over eighty I used to see them sitting together in the garden, wondering what they were talking about and why they smiled so happily. I think I know now, Jules. Maybe, when they were very young, they had two mad, wonderful weeks, when nothing mattered except that they were in love and young and foolish. Perhaps the memory of it was like a fire which, even as they looked back, had the power to warm them over the years between. . . . It has all been so wonderful, Jules. I don't ever want us to talk about it to anyone. One can't put the really happy foolish things into words without making them seem . . . ridiculous . . . and I don't think love is ever ridiculous, except to the people outside and looking in."

At the top of the next rise the lake came into view, looking more like a vast sheet of glass. To the east, the mountains, the setting sun, were reflected upon the glass. While nearer at hand the valley's were filling with purple gloom and the lake itself was turning to a translucent smoke blue, like that of some gigantic moonstone.

Stopping the car, Jules led Diana to a grassy knoll commanding a better view of the changing panorama spread before them. From where they stood nothing man-made was visible, nor any sign that Man had ever come that way. Wraiths of mist were already beginning to screen the distant ~~Palau~~ Samosir from view. High in the upper atmosphere clouds of volcanic dust were catching the sun's last rays and hurling them back defiantly in a phantasmagoria of flaming colour.

"It's frightening, Jules," whispered Diana in awe. "It's as though all the gods were angry with us for being so happy."

"They are jealous, Diane," said Jules, clasping her tightly to him. "I think they are always jealous when men are happy . . . perhaps they believe that only gods have the right to be happy."

They waited until the last of the colour had drained from the sky and the face of Toba was obscured by a grey curtain, which in a little while became inky black, with the blackness which is the negation of all colour. Then, slowly, they returned to the car.

Since the remainder of the way back to the lakeside hotel was all downhill, Jules did not trouble to start the engine of the car. When, about a mile from the starting point, the car had begun to gather a great momentum, Jules applied the brakes to check the headlong rush. To his dismay he found, even using all his strength, that their effect was barely perceptible. Switching on the ignition, he tried to start the engine. Once the engine began to turn, he counted on being able to accelerate and throw the car into gear. The engine would not start. By now the car was swaying down

the gradient at a terrible rate. Then came the hideous screeching of shrill voices, and the two men tried to engage them.

The car was all the time moving forward, the top was still up as a protection from the afternoon sun. "The brakes are not very good, Diane," said Jules in a calm voice. "Unscrew the nut which holds the hood on your side. I will do the same. Then, when we reach the water, we shall be thrown clear."

With the butterfly nuts unscrewed, the hood was caught in a tremendous blast of air. It flew back and with a splintering crash was ripped clean off the car.

"You see, Diane?" said Jules with a tight-lipped smile. "It is as I told you. The gods are jealous of us, but we will try to cheat them."

"I am not afraid, Jules," said Diana. He did not hear her, for the words were plucked from her mouth and hurled behind them. Strangely, she realised that she was not afraid. The only sensation was one of icy calm.

The car skidded perilously round the last bend, swung across the road, and answering to the wrenched steering wheel, gathered more speed on the final stretch to the lake, whose black surface reflected the beam of the headlights.

Diana now squatted on her heels on the seat, keeping her head just below the top of the wire screen to avoid the blast of air which surged across it. The car struck the water obliquely at the precise moment Diana chose to jump. She seemed to hurtle through the air, her body striking the water some twenty feet from the shore, the impact driving the air from her lungs. When she came to the surface, gasping for breath, there was complete silence. She retained consciousness long enough to see two men with lanterns emerge from the hotel and to claw the sand of the foreshore with her hands.

When full consciousness returned to Diana, she was lying on the bed in a darkened room. Through cracks in the matchboard wall she could see lights and hear the murmur

of voices. Except for a dull pain running across her chest and ribs, and a slight headache, she did not believe she was seriously hurt. The events of the mad rush down to the lake were perfectly clear in her mind. She remembered hearing that when a body fell on to water with sufficient velocity, or impact, water was as resilient as concrete. That was precisely how she felt: as though she had had a bad fall.

Then, feeling a sense of guilt that she had not thought of him before, Diana suddenly remembered Jules. Despite excruciating pain when she moved, she managed to get her feet to the ground and stand erect. Taking short, painful steps, she fumbled towards the door and emerged on to the landing. Through the open door next to her own she saw a tall European and two servants of the hotel grouped round the bed, whose occupant was not visible. As she entered the room Jules, who was lying on his back, fluttered back to consciousness. His face seemed quite normal. Hearing the creak of the boards behind him, the tall European turned, standing aside so as to allow Diana to approach the bed. "I am a doctor," he said gently "You should lie down and rest."

"How is he, doctor?" asked Diana, ignoring the injunction.

"He is badly hurt"

"How badly, doctor? I must know—the truth"

"I have not yet examined him properly. Go back to bed and, in a little time, I will come to you and tell you."

Jules's eyes closed again and, with the doctor at her elbow, Diana returned to her room, where one of the servants had lit the lamp. "Courage, madam!" said the doctor in gentle tones. "I will come back soon."

Diana seldom resorted to tears. In the major crises of life tears were, she believed, contemptible. Now, faced with the unknown, she wished tears would come.

In the next room there was silence now, broken occasionally by a deep groan. From time to time someone, presumably the 'doctor', moved across the room, briefly obscuring

the crack of light. Then there was a tap as the doctor closed his bag. Footsteps were heard on the landing and, to Diana's relief, her own husband came quietly to admit the doctor. He was a tall, gaunt man, prematurely aged, with a big, generous and sensitive mouth. Drawing up a chair, he sat down. He seemed tired.

Diana watched him closely. He seemed to be searching for words.

"He has many broken bones," the doctor began. "If it is no more than that, I can save him. Little bones can be mended, is it not so? But I think it is better you should know all the truth. He is bleeding internally. That may be a small thing, but it may be very bad. If he could be moved to a hospital . . . but he cannot be moved again. We will hope for the best, but you must be prepared for—the worst. I go now; ten miles from here there is a telephone. I will have nurses and another doctor come here . . . they will be here by the morning."

"There is hope?" asked Diana, fighting to retain her calm.

"There is always hope." The doctor put out a comforting hand on Diana's shoulder and was gone, but he left behind him some of that healing presence, without which mere medical skill can be a poor thing. He left Diana with the conviction that nothing which should be done would be left undone. A moment later, he turned to slip two tablets into her mouth. "Swallow these," he said, handing her a glass of water. A moment after she had swallowed them Diana wished she had not done so. The doctor must have read the unspoken fear in her eyes, for he said: "They will make you sleep. But have no fear. He too, will sleep until morning . . . and there will be no change in the morning."

When she was alone, Diana tried to stifle the fear which lay round her heart. A terrifying vista had been open to her: a future in which, if the doctor's worst fears were realised, there would be no Jules. The thought was like being suspended in the void of outer space, too horrible for

contemplation. There, in the quiet of the night, thanks to the tablets of forgetfulness, he has his little fool's paradise of narcosis, where he can dream away his last fear and where a roseate haze vignettes the stark outlines of reality.

XIV

It is said by those who should know that a condemned felon, waiting in his cell for news of his appeal, suffers during this period the worst of his punishment. It is not until all hope has fled that he achieves calm in the face of a certainty which, however ghastly, has the virtue of certainty.

For three days and three nights Diana suffered the tortures of uncertainty, enduring mental anguish almost to the limit of her endurance. Dr De Boer, his assistant and two nurses, laboured for hours the first day, probing pieces of splintered rib and, in ways they did not discuss outside the sickroom, trying to check the internal bleeding. On the second day, although he was barely conscious, they allowed Diana to visit Jules for a few minutes. On the third day, Dr De Boer came down to the lake shore where Diana, in a fever of impatience, was waiting for him. His face revealed nothing.

Putting his huge, competent hand upon hers and sighing deeply, the doctor broke the news. "You must be brave," he began. "There is nothing more we can do. Your husband is conscious now. You may speak with him—as long as you like. Nothing can do him any harm—now."

Jules smiled weakly as Diana entered the room. For fifteen full minutes, without speaking a word, they held hands, and as they did so it seemed as though an electric current flowed steadily between them, creating perfect understanding far beyond the realm of words.

"We must talk of the future, Diane," said Jules at length.

"And there is not much time. You will go to your brother, yes?"

Diana nodded.

"When it is finished," Jules continued, "and when you feel able to do so, you will please write to my father. Do not send a cablegram, for there is too long delay before a letter can reach him. Let him think for another six weeks that he has a son. It is better so . . . and when you return to Europe, you will go to see him?"

"Of course, Jules."

"There is a letter for you, Diane. I wrote it more than a week ago, out there on Toba. . . ."

"You *knew* this was going to happen, Jules?"

"I had a strange feeling that I would never leave Toba, Diane. I am glad now that I wrote the letter, because now, you see, it is not necessary to talk of many things. Keep the letter, Diane, and do not be in a hurry to open it and read it . . . there is no hurry. There is a letter there"—he pointed to a painted deal chest of drawers—"for my father also. I wish you to read that too, and when you send it to him you will know what to write."

As though the effort of talking had been too much, Jules closed his eyes briefly and when he opened them Diana was weeping softly.

"No tears, Diane, no tears. You do not want me to go away from you to remember you with tears in your eyes? There have never been any tears between us, Diane, and there must be none now. For us it has been to make love and to laugh. . . . I want to remember you as you were climbing out of the lake like a goddess, with the water running off the pearls and the sun kissing your breasts. With something like that to remember, Diane, I am not afraid to die and you . . . you must not be afraid to live. It is of that I must speak to you. . . ."

"I do not think I shall want to live, Jules."

"But that is not logical, Diane. That is foolishness. Just because you have enjoyed these wonderful days and nights with Jules, you must not be sad. Nobody can take them away

from you, nor from me. It is not ended, Diane, only a chapter is closed. It was full of joy, then its memory will bring you joy again, but it is no reason to be sad. For a little time, of course, you will be sad. For a little time, I think, I would like you to be sad. But for always—no! That would be foolish. Also, I would be angry, for don't you see, Jules taught you a little how to live . . . and how will Jules like to see the lessons wasted, thrown away. I am a Frenchman, *cherie*, and we French are a most economical people, who do not like waste. . . . That is better, *cherie*, it is always better to laugh."

"I will try not to waste the lessons, Jules. I will try hard."

"I want you to understand something, Diane. It is most important that you should understand. Out there on Toba, when I did the naughtiness of dropping those not-so-good Japanese pearls into the water, it was because I was jealous. It hurt me that you should wear rubbish given to you by another man . . . it hurt me to see the regret in your eyes as they went down into the deep water."

"I was jealous then, Diane, but now I am no more jealous. If the poor young man who gave you those pearls came here to my bed now, do you know what I would say to him?"

Diana, her throat choked by a great lump, shook her head.

"If you can make Diane happy," I would say to him, "then you are a most fortunate young man and may *le bon Dieu* bless both of you." That is what I would say, Diane, because I see everything clearly now. I am suddenly become wise and there is no room in my heart for such foolishness as jealousy.

"Life will look different, Diane, that is all. It is I who will soon die, not you. Out there on Toba for a little time we had too much happiness . . . there is only so much happiness for any of us . . . perhaps we burned the fire too brightly and now we complain that there is nothing left but ashes. That is not logical, Diane. It is better to remember, as I remember, what a wonderful fire it was, how warm and happy we were when it was burning. I think, Diane, that the fire will go on warming you until you are a little old

lady, so that when you are dead, the adoration, no matter what may have happened, will be sweet. You will be free. Memories will be sweet. You will be free. You will be free. Promises are chains and I want you to be free."

"I won't make any promises, Jules, but I shall remember every word you say and I will try . . . try, as I have never tried before, to be happy. I understand now how you think, and because I love you so very much, Jules, I believe you will never be far away from me."

Through clenched teeth Jules uttered a groan which would not be suppressed. The nurse who was waiting outside the door heard it and brought the doctor, who motioned Diana to leave the room.

As Diana reached the lake shore a heavy shower of rain fell through the rays of the setting sun and a vast rainbow straddled Toba, one foot planted beyond the mountains and the other seeming to dip into the water. The rain helped to cool the fever of anguish, mingling with the tears which would not be denied.

"There is only a little time now," came the kind voice of Dr De Boer. "I have given him something to stop the pain, and when he goes to sleep in a few minutes he will not wake again."

As Diana climbed the flight of wooden stairs leading to the balcony of the sickroom, the rain was streaming down her face and body, and at the moment she entered the room the dying splendour of the sun shone through a side window full on to her. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and it seemed as though the mingled raindrops and tears had been turned into pearls.

The dying man looked up with wonderment and adoration in his eyes. "You are so beautiful, Diane, that now I am ready to die, because there is nothing more to see."

Jules closed his eyes. With her arms around him and her lips against his ear, Diana whispered to him little things she believed would give him comfort on the journey which lay ahead. Before the curtain of oblivion fell Jules's last whispered words were: ". . . the goddess who came out of the lake."

A woman, pale and thin, found an open grave in the Lumenan Mission cemetery, situated on an eminence commanding a broad view of Toba. Diana, standing at the head of the grave, dry-eyed and proudly erect, saw wonderingly that there were tears in the eyes of two women. Briefly she felt a gust of anger. Of all those present she alone, surely, had the right to shed tears for Jules Duvivier? Then, ashamed of her anger, Diana's mood softened. The tears of these others were, perhaps, for all the sorrow and mourning and heartbreak of a suffering world, without any personal significance.

Dr De Boer, whose efforts to save Jules had ended in failure, stood beside Diana. He could do nothing more for the dead: his duty now was to the living. Of all those present, he alone knew something of this proud young woman's grief and sense of irreparable loss. He alone knew of her relationship with Jules and the secret was safe with him.

There was little about human grief which the kindly Dutch doctor did not know. He had seen dry eyed grief before and he knew that there came a breaking-point at which, if tears would not flow, the agony of grief became too much. As a doctor he knew that tears were to grief what sweet oils were to a burned skin, but the knowledge did not permit him to think of it in clinical terms.

The Lutheran pastor's guttural voice droned on, made inaudible when clods of earth struck a wooden box, than which to Diana's ears there was no more terrible sound, carrying as it did such blank and utter finality. Not even the hope of resurrection, which lay implicit behind the pastor's gutturals, had any meaning. Diana longed for it all to be over, so that she could escape and be alone with her grief.

It was soon done. Dr De Boer, offering no explanation, led her to his car and after some thirty minutes over an unfamiliar road, led her into a cool house with tiled floors.

An elderly woman with a weather-beaten face, rose from a rocking chair. "I am your hostess," explained the good woman, "and I hope that you are very welcome." Diana did not reply.

Dazed and feeling unable to protest, Diana followed Mevrouw De Boer into a severely furnished, almost monastic, room where, piled in one corner, were all her own and Jules's belongings, brought from the hotel. The older woman spoke a few words in her own language and, smiling sadly, left the room.

The window of the room looked out across Toba, shimmering in the golden afternoon sun. Diana drew down the blind, for the sight evoked too many memories. When darkness fell it did not seem worth the effort to light an oil lamp, beside which stood a box of matches, with one match projecting from the box invitingly.

Diana tried in the solitude of the room to draw comfort from the knowledge that billions of men and women had gone through the same ordeal and billions more would do so in the future, but there was no comfort that way. Grief was too personal to be disposed of statistically. All she knew was that where her heart had been was now only an ache which seemed to have weight and substance.

A little after sundown a servant brought a tray and lit the lamp. Seeing the baggage untouched, he offered to unpack. On the tray was an envelope. It contained two tablets and a note which read: "Take these with water. They will give you sleep."

On the afternoon of the third day, Dr De Boer found Diana walking in the garden. Leading her to a quiet spot, he brought from his pocket a fat envelope. "Your husband gave me this to keep for you," he said. "He loved you very much. Even in his great pain before he died, he wanted that you should not have any worry."

The envelope contained one thousand florins in notes.

"He asked me to look after you and to tell you not to remain here near Toba. You must know," he added hastily, "that my wife and I will be happy for you to stay until you

feel able to travel, but I am not fit to travel. My husband was right. It is better that I should stay here. There is nothing to keep me here."

"You have been very kind to me," Diana faltered.

"It is a doctor's duty to try to be kind," he replied without any trace of self-righteousness. "In a little time you will remember the happiness and forget the other. You are young and you must live your life. It was your husband's wish that you should do so."

The kindness of strangers was easier to bear somehow than that of intimates would have been. Before the car drove her away from their door, Diana kissed Mevrouw De Boer, hoping that the gesture would carry more force than words. On the evening before she left, Dr De Boer told Diana of the grief which was never very far away from him and his wife, who had lost their own son three years previously in tragic circumstances. From that moment Diana found that her own sorrow was less egocentric and that there was a place for others in her sympathy. It was not that her sense of loss became less acute, but that she was able to see herself as a participant in the general sorrow of humanity, one of a vast band of mourners who had it in their power to comfort each other.

These thoughts made it easier to return alone along the road which she and Jules had travelled together.



PART III

I

JACK MAYNARD, sitting moodily at the bar of the Fort Mallet Club, turned the point of his shoulder slightly so that, without appearing impolite, he was spared the necessity of speaking to Maggie Kennedy, who had just come in. Ordinarily, he would have been delighted to talk to her, but now he dreaded her searching questions. Diana had been back nearly two weeks and had, on various pretexts, shunned any social contacts.

Something had happened, but what it was Jack did not know. All he knew was that Diana had changed, at times, so much so that he was shocked. Unpacking might have accounted for her not having made a public appearance on the first day after her return, or even the second, but now two weeks had passed and she had not once emerged from the small bungalow they shared, except to potter listlessly in the garden. After a few days, thinking it the more tactful course, people had refrained from asking questions, but they were, obviously, one large question mark. Fort Mallet was too small for him to say, with any chance of being believed, that Diana was ill. For, if she were ill, why had she not sent for Dr McCloskey?

Then Jack heard the summons he dreaded. "Won't you come over and join me, Jack?" called Maggie Kennedy. "We do look unsociable."

Since they were the only two people in the great lounge, Jack put the best possible face on it and sat down at the table where Maggie was sipping tea.

"I'm worried about Diana, Jack," said the Resident's wife, launching without preamble into her subject. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you, Maggie, but I don't think there is. There isn't anything I can do for her, and I expect she'll be all right."

"Will you do anything I can do for her, I'd like to, I don't want to interfere, but I keep wondering whether Mac ought not to see her. What do you think?"

Jack Maynard had a boundless faith in Maggie's kindness and sagacity. Now that the subject had been broached, he was relieved, although he knew that Diana would not be pleased. "I just don't know what to say, Maggie," he replied. "I've never seen Diana like this. She's so—so strange in her manner, doesn't seem interested in anything and doesn't want to talk—even to me."

"Has she had any great shock, do you think?"

"She has said nothing...."

"Then," said Maggie, pursing her lips, "I think I'll have to go and see her. The poor girl oughtn't to be alone like this. You're worried, too, Jack, I can see that."

"I think," said Jack hastily, "it would be better not to go, Maggie. It's awfully kind of you, but... well, I really think Diana wants to be alone." He had a fair idea that if Maggie were to intrude unasked, Diana would say things better left unsaid. When he had suggested that she might like to have a chat with Maggie, Diana had replied: "I don't want that nosy creature near me, thank you. She may be able to run the lives of people here, but she isn't going to run mine. Don't let her come here, or I won't be responsible for what happens."

Escaping as quickly as he could from Maggie, Jack Maynard returned home to his sister, determined, if it were possible, to find out what was wrong and, if it lay within his power, to put it right. There was nothing he would not have done for his sister. Nevertheless, the idea of helping her seemed to him almost impertinent, for in his eyes she was so much wiser and cleverer than he would ever be. That she needed help, was obvious; that the only person in Fort Mallet capable of rendering that help was Maggie, seemed to him just as obvious.

He found Diana in the room, pretending to read a book. "Have a nice game?"

"I didn't play. I was too busy to go to the ballroom, though enough to allow myself to be cornered by Maggie. It was very awkward, Di. I had the devil's own job stopping her from coming over to see you."

"Jack," said Diana in a more gentle voice than she had used since her return, "it occurs to me that I'm not being quite fair to you. You've your job to consider and, after all, this Maggie is the Resident's wife. . . . Would you like me to go away, Jack? I don't expect I'm very good company for you."

"Of course I don't want you to go away, Di," was the indignant reply. "But, since we're talking about things, why not tell me what's wrong and let's see if there is anything to be done. What is it, Di?"

"What's usually wrong when a girl is as unhappy as I am, Jack?"

"Has some man treated you badly? If that . . . "

"Yes, Jack. Some man has treated me badly. He did the cruellest thing he could have done: he died. I loved him very dearly, Jack. That's all. I feel all dead inside. I only tell you this so that you can see for yourself that there isn't anything you, or anyone else, can do. I've got to find my own way back to life, and I'm trying—trying so desperately hard, because he would have want—me to. He *did* want me to. It's only because of *his* good opinion, Jack, that I haven't killed myself. But I'm over the worst of it now, so don't worry. I'm sorry, Jack," she added impulsively. "It isn't fair to inflict all my troubles on you. I must be impossible to live with . . . but soon, you'll see a change."

With this Jack was content. It did not occur to him to wonder, more than fleetingly, who the man could have been. In her own time and if she wanted to, Diana would tell him more. Nevertheless, deep down in his heart he believed that in some way Maggie, if she were told everything, would be able to help. It had been a great shock to Jack Maynard that Diana and Maggie—the two people in

the world he believed to be the best criticism—had not instantly
been converted. Diana, of which proves
nothing. Diana, who knew little
of the world, and that our twin loyalties were being put to a
severe

"In that way, Di," Jack remarked a little later in the evening. "I have to go off on patrol next week. I shall be away from two to three weeks...."

"I'm glad, Jack. Then, by the time you return, I hope I shall have pulled myself together."

"I wasn't thinking about that, Di, but about you being alone—here. Maggie is certain to ask you to stay at the Residency.... It's going to be difficult to refuse, too, because Kennedy himself feels very strongly that no woman should live unprotected here."

"Then, if it's going to put you in a difficult position, Jack, I'll go—for good. Nothing—nothing at all would persuade me to stay at the Residency. I couldn't stand it, Jack."

"Then before I go, Di," said Jack miserably and incomprehendingly, "I shall have to arrange for a Malay constable to act as a sort of watchman after sunset. Otherwise, I know, Kennedy will put his foot down and . well, as you can see, I'm not in a position to disobey a direct order."

This was the first real conversation Jack and Diana had had since the latter's return. They both felt better for it, even though Diana's uncompromising attitude made things difficult. During dinner and afterwards they chatted of lighter things and to the undiscerning Jack, his sister seemed happier.

They were about to retire for the night when an orderly arrived with a telegram. Seeing her brother's worried look as he read it, Diana lingered. "What is it?" she asked harshly, as though she were already aware that in some way it concerned her.

"It's from the police in Singapore, Di. Adrian Hornby has got himself into trouble there. He assaulted some fellow in a club and they say that more serious charges may follow, which means that the chap may die, don't you see."

"What's the matter?" asked Diana, trying to keep the urge.

"It's an odd case. I hope for poor old Adrian. Take it for nothing else that he doesn't die. . . ."

"Why do they cable you, Jack?"

"Well, they know he lives here, evidently, and they want further information about him."

Jack was already busy drafting a reply.

"What are you going to tell them, Jack?"

"The truth, Di: that Adrian had a bad fall here some months ago and that in the opinion of the Medical Officer here who treated him it might have affected his mind. I'll have a word with old Mac before it goes, just to be on the safe side."

"You won't mention the evening when he hit John, will you?"

"No, Di, not unless I am asked the specific question. Then, of course, I should have to. Leave it to me to make it as easy as I can for him."

Diana was left to her thoughts while her brother, after a brief visit to Angus McCloskey, went to his office to send the cablegram.

"I think, Jack," she said on his return to the bungalow, "that I'd better go away before I do you some terrible harm. I seem to bring trouble to everyone."

At intervals through the night Jack heard heartrending sobs coming from his sister's room, so that he felt impelled to ponder this remark, which had been uttered in a dead and hopeless voice. It was all so unlike Diana, who had always carried herself proudly and erect through everything. Indeed, casting his mind back over the years to nursery days, he could hardly remember an occasion when she had taken refuge in tears.

MAGGIE KENNEDY put down her cup and, fumbling among the old socks and shirts waiting for cuffs to be turned, which cluttered her workbag, pulled out the binoculars. Giving the lenses an unusually careful polishing, she directed her gaze towards the garden of the Maynard bungalow where, in the shade of a huge umbrella, Diana was eating her solitary breakfast. Diana was sitting bolt upright, seeming to look away into space, nibbling mechanically at what was probably a piece of toast. Something caused Diana to rise abruptly from the table and enter the house. Maggie blushed furiously a few moments later, when, scanning the Maynard garden with intense interest, she saw another pair of binoculars turned in her own direction. The two pairs of binoculars continued to survey one another until at last it was Maggie who lowered hers.

At tea that afternoon Maggie blushed again for, on looking in the direction of the Maynard garden, she saw, greatly to her embarrassment, that a bamboo screen had been erected, making further observation impossible. To Maggie Kennedy this was a declaration of war, no less.

"You seem somewhat annoyed, Maggie," observed Hugh Kennedy mildly. "What has happened?"

"It's that impudent Maynard girl!"

"Now what has the poor girl done to incur your displeasure?"

"This morning she glared at me through glasses and now, if you please, she has put up a screen. It's like a slap in the face. . . . I'm old enough to be her mother."

"Perhaps, my dear, she doesn't like being watched. I don't think I would if the position were reversed. What, if I am not indiscreet, did you expect to see?"

"Heaven knows," continued Maggie, conveniently ignoring her husband's question, "that I only want to help the girl. Her brother has been away a week now and she hasn't been outside the bungalow, nor talked to anyone except the

servants. It isn't that I'm not fond of you, you know it. I feel a sense of responsibility."

"You know, in a way, that I do, too. I mean with a faint smile, "the dividing line between curiosity and what you are pleased to call a sense of responsibility is sometimes hard to find. There are some people who—unlike us—are not naturally gregarious. I think Diana Maynard is one of them. Also, some people don't like discussing their troubles with anyone. I think you should respect these little peculiarities . . ."

"But to put up a screen, Hugh! It's—it's insulting."

"To intrude upon the girl's privacy with field glasses could be construed in ways which would reflect no credit upon you, my dear."

This was so obviously true that Maggie offered no comment. Leaving the honours with her husband, she beat a retreat. She was aware of a fault in her husband's argument, but could not quite put her finger on it. The paramount question was one of intent. Her own intentions were, she believed, quite pure. She was actuated by a desire to help a young woman for whom, as doyenne of Fort Mallet, she felt a certain responsibility. That the girl herself wanted no help was, as Maggie saw it, unimportant, although Hugh had, perversely, tried to turn the tables.

Over the years Maggie had grown so accustomed to being the recipient of confidences that, when they were withheld, she felt righteously angry, and with Maggie, to feel righteously angry was the prelude to action. What was so completely infuriating was that, locked in the drawer of her desk, was a letter from an old friend in Singapore giving in some detail an account of Diana's unfortunate night at sea with Colin Peregrine. Her correspondent, a charitable woman, had expressed the opinion that Diana was completely guiltless in the matter and that Peregrine, a notorious *routé*, had engineered the whole thing out of spite. With this view Maggie herself concurred. She did not believe from her personal knowledge of Diana that she was the sort of young woman to indulge in a sordid liaison with a casual

acquaintance. Furthermore, I do not believe that this story of a secret love affair is responsible for Diana's refusal to see me.

All of which proves that Maggie Kennedy was, although a busybody, a shrewd judge of human character and motive and that, even if exceedingly angry at being rebuffed by Diana, was fair enough not to allow her judgment to be swayed. It must also be said in defence of Maggie that not even to her husband had she revealed the contents of the letter, nor would she in any circumstances do so. In her strange zeal to solve human problems and perplexities, she had fallen into the error of doubting whether any solutions, except those achieved by Maggie Kennedy, were valid.

Diana, seen through binoculars, was certainly not ill. Her movements were not those of a sick person. It followed, therefore, that Diana's trouble, whatever it was, arose from some great personal experience. In the case of a lovely girl like Diana, Maggie argued with some logic, the only probable personal experience sufficiently great to cause her to isolate herself in this strange fashion would be a man. What man? There was a certain discrepancy in dates which had to be accounted for. Diana's disappearance from view in Singapore, according to Maggie's correspondent, had occurred approximately five weeks before the date on which she had embarked at Singapore for Port Mallet. Where and with whom had those five weeks been spent? What had happened in those five weeks to turn a young, beautiful and, certainly where men were concerned, popular young woman, into the misanthropic solitary she now appeared to be? Maggie applied herself diligently to the task of securing answers to these questions for, in the face of the unaccustomed rebuffs and frustrations, curiosity was devouring her like a fever.

If, on the morning following these events, Maggie had observed Dr Angus McCloskey's gangling figure leave the hospital and enter the gate of the Maynard bungalow, it is doubtful whether she could have resisted the temptation to waylay him on his departure.

McCloskey announced his arrival at the bungalow with a loud "Oy!" Diana, who had been writing a letter to her mother, turned to him. "I'm not a doctor, neither pleasure nor practice was to be had from her face. "Jack's away," she said pleasantly. "Didn't you know?"

"Sure, I knew. That's why I'm here. It isn't good for anyone, to say nothing of a beautiful young woman, to spend her time alone, writing letters"—his glance fell upon a pack of cards—"and playing patience. I'm here as a friend, Diana, not as a doctor. If you want to see me professionally, you'll have to send for me."

"I certainly don't need to see you professionally, Mac, and I'm not sure I wanted to see you as a friend either. But since you're here, I think I'm glad. Sit down, won't you? You weren't sent here by Mrs Kennedy, were you?" Diana added suspiciously.

"No, Maggie knows me too well to think she could use me as a stalking-horse. But I wouldn't put it past her, mind you. Anyway, welcome back. I'm glad to see you, Diana. Jimmie misses you too."

"Now," said Diana laughing, although she did not realise it, for the first time for weeks, "now I really am touched! How many languages does Jimmie talk these days?"

"He's getting along very nicely, thank you, but he isn't yet good at expressing abstract thoughts. He's still a little primitive, our Jimmie. But let's forget Jimmie for the moment and talk about you. What's wrong, Diana? What, if anything, can I do to help? If you say it's nothing, I shan't believe you. If you tell me to mind my own business and go to hell, I'll do that too."

"At least, thank you, Mac, for not being tactful. I don't think I could have endured tact. I know you are being kind, but I don't honestly believe that there's anything you, or anyone else, can do. I've been through a bad time, Mac, so bad that I wanted to die. I'm getting over it a bit and now, to be truthful, I just don't care whether I live or

die. I can't talk about it . . . I'm not that kind, Mac. I wish I could. I've been thinking about it. I thought it possible to be and now I know it's impossible. I'm still present paying for it. But, "if it will make you feel any better, will you please prescribe a tonic for me, something that tastes so bad it must be good for me?"

"I understand, Diana. Don't try to talk about it. Life baits the traps so damned cunningly, doesn't it? I was once walking about in heaven and I put my foot on a trapdoor. Next thing I knew, I was in hell and wondering how I got there. You've probably discovered by now that there isn't any way of climbing back up to heaven and it's waste of time trying. The only sensible thing to do is to buy an asbestos suit and make the best of hell. The funny thing is that hell can be quite tolerably pleasant. The thing to do is to forget that you've been in heaven. Well, I won't say forget it, but don't dwell on it too much."

"You sound as though you know the whole story, Mac. Do you?"

"Your story, do you mean? Of course, I do. Do you take me for a halfwit, or something? You went to heaven with a man and then, either he was unfaithful to you, or you learned that he was married, or he died. There isn't any other story. They're all variations of the same old story and the only people who think there's anything original about them are the people to whom they happen. They, for some funny reason, always think they are unique. I hope, for your sake, Diana, that he's dead. That way, don't you see, you can keep your illusions for ever. Hang on to 'em, my girl, hang on to 'em! Illusions are the only things worth keeping. You read in the newspapers of poor devils who go broke, or who have some appalling misfortune happen to them and they commit suicide. Do you know why? They've lost all their illusions and there's no more reason for living. I'm a doctor, Diana. I've seen hundreds of people die. You'd be surprised how many of them could have lived a few more years—if they'd wanted to. But they didn't: they had no more illusions."

"You're a very kind doctor, Mac. Thank you for coming. I feel better already. I've been walking and talking. Jack's a dear and I love him. He's a bit of a fellow. I've had a terrible time stopping him from calling in Dr. Maggie. He thinks she's wonderful. What I think about her, I intend to keep to myself."

"I know," said McCloskey soothingly. "I feel that way sometimes myself. The best of Maggie is very good, you know, while the worst of her isn't worse than irritating. But in your case, I don't prescribe Maggie."

"What do you prescribe, Mac?"

"Get out and about. See people. Take a drink. Play tennis. The more you put it off, the harder it's going to be. I've got to go now. There's a trusting dolt over there at the hospital who thinks I'm a good surgeon. He's waiting for me to take out his appendix. Don't ever have any malady here that requires good surgery, Diana. You won't get it and it would be a pity to do anything to spoil a magnificent chassis like yours."

Diana spent the half-hour after McCloskey's departure hating the unknown woman who had thrown the amiable doctor's life off its axis, driving one of London's rising diagnosticians into inglorious exile in this tropical back-water.

As though Diana were aware of the excellent effect of sparing sympathy for someone else, she decided on the spur of the moment to pay a visit to the only person in Fort Mallet whom she believed to be more miserable than herself. She found Jimmie, a puzzled expression on his face, playing with an abacus. He was so intent upon his task that he seemed not to notice Diana's arrival.

The ape appeared to be obsessed with the number three, for he grouped the beads on the top line in threes and gave every sign of annoyance when, from whichever end he began, there was always an odd bead left over after the other nine had been separated into three groups of three. At length and after many tries, he hurled the abacus to the far corner of his cage and condescended to notice his visitor.

In a low voice, which seemed to soothe Jimmie's irritation, Diana recited a poem of her own perplexities. He listened intently and with great interest and pleasure, finding, probably in the tremble of her voice, something which had the power to convey the deep sympathy she felt for him.

McCloskey had discovered Jimmie's sense of rhythm and on more than one occasion at his request Diana had recited nursery rhymes and other jingles. Jimmie, with undoubted pleasure, had listened wide-eyed, waving a hand in tune with the music. Now, not knowing quite why, Diana recited:

*Flow gently, Sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise.
My Mary's asleep by the murmuring stream,
Flow gently, Sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.*

Jimmie was enchanted. It required very little stretch of the imagination to believe that he, from the depths of his murky melancholy, sensed the sweet melancholy which lay behind the lines. Gripping the bars of his cage with up-stretched hands and resting his chin upon one arm, Jimmie seemed to implore Diana to continue. By way of an encore Diana gave him a slightly *risqué* limerick which was having a vogue. As though aware of its indelicacy, Jimmie shook his head violently in protest, so by way of reparation Diana began Gray's *Elegy*. This was more in keeping with Jimmie's taste, but he did not show the same entranced pleasure as at *Sweet Afton*.

"That's enough for one day, Jimmie," said Diana at length. "Maybe I'll come again tomorrow."

Before Diana had gone twenty yards, Jimmie began to howl and to rattle the bars of his cage. She retraced her footsteps and began to talk reprovingly. McCloskey arrived just as Diana was beginning to recite *Sweet Afton* again. Jimmie immediately became quiet, listening with the breathless interest of a child being told an exciting bedtime story. The ape looked angrily at McCloskey and, when the poem was finished, turned his back sulkily. The party was over for Jimmie.

"Well," said Diana, a little embarrassed, "you should propose him to me. He's a member of the Burns Club. I suspect he has some Scottish blood in his veins. I wish him with a Highland ~~lament~~ I suppose," she continued in serious vein, "that nothing will persuade you to give him his freedom? That's all he wants. Give it to him, Mac."

"I don't think our Jimmie is much interested in his freedom," replied McCloskey thoughtfully. "He's lost his taste for the jungle now. He's caught a glimpse of the top of the ladder. . . ."

"He's uncannily human, Mac. He—he frightens me a little, because I feel sure he feels his inarticulacy."

"At all events," said McCloskey, "he's human enough to be disloyal. I mean nothing to him these days: he's transferred his loyalty to you."

Diana left after that, not wishing to pursue the subject further. For more than an hour after she had returned home Jimmie's howls of rage and frustration could be heard all round The Green.

III

A FEW weeks previously nothing had had any meaning for Diana except the fact that Jules's voice was stilled for ever. Now the need for going on living was making itself apparent. Brutal as the phrase was, she found that Jules was beginning to fall into perspective. It no longer seemed disloyal to Jules to be hungry or thirsty; to enjoy the splendour of the dawn hour; to chuckle at some barbed witticism she read. When it came to making plans for the future, however, Diana came up against a blank wall in her imagination. It was still impossible to look more than a few hours ahead.

The void was a stark reality. Nobody, Diana believed, would ever take the place of Jules in her life. There was, in process of creation within her, a special compartment where,

far from the public gaze and insulated from comparison, Jules still lived on, without growing old, but Jules was condemned to perpetually wonder if the timbre of his laughter would never change, nor his hair grow grey. There was no danger now that his kisses would grow cold with the passing years.

It was now possible to concentrate the mind upon other people, facts and incidents. The mortal hurt was still there, but scar tissue was forming over it, blunting the sharp anguish down to a dull ache. The task of accustoming herself to life without Jules was complicated further by Diana's knowledge that she herself was not the same person. Ill-understood, but profound, changes had taken place. Perhaps the only compensation for these changes was that just as the ability to feel ecstasy had atrophied, so had to some degree the capacity for pain.

Robust health and a beauty which was of its essence vital had always conspired to cut Diana off from the sympathy of her fellows. To have felt sorry for her would, somehow, have seemed an impertinence. So, because so many people, failing to find objects of pity, find that the only alternative is envy, Diana had grown accustomed to reading envy in other eyes. As she was to discover when she again took her place in the world, envy would die out of many eyes, to be replaced by something kindlier.

This is not to say that because of the ordeal through which she had passed, Diana had lost her beauty. This was not so. The beauty was still there, but some of its brazen, bounding vitality was gone. Suffering had etched upon her face the subtle, delicate lines of its signature. Passion, the half-brother of suffering, had paused to give to the firm contours of youth its richer, more voluptuous lines.

To look at Diana now was like looking at a familiar scene, recognisable, but faintly distorted by a heat haze. All the old features were there, but with something else, something elusive, defying the narrow prison of precise definition. The greatest change of all was in the eyes which, so the poets say, are the mirrors of the soul. Diana's eyes moved more

slowly, no longer able to pick up the light. They looked inward and within colour could not be found and without was only emptiness, as though within was a world she knew and understood, where deep experience made new frontiers not worth exploring.

The changes wrought in Diana had given her a new, and wistful beauty, with all its erstwhile power to charm the senses of those who saw it and an added power which, paradoxically, comes to those no longer thrilled by power. To the bees the bud is a sterile, frustrated thing, unworthy of notice, while nectar is the monopoly of the flower in full bloom.

Two days after Angus McCloskey visited her, Diana's resolution hardened. He had been right when he said that the longer she delayed mixing with other people, the harder it would be to do so. Hovering upon her lips as she took her tennis racquet from its press was a whispered appeal, sent forth into the blue like a random arrow. It was an appeal to Jules, wherever he might be, to understand that in taking refuge in death, he had left her to face life alone. High in the sky was a tiny wisp of white, fleecy cloud which, for Diana, was the symbol of Jules. As she looked it seemed to disintegrate, and as it did so gave her courage to believe that Jules would understand and approve.

Diana went over early to the Fort Mallet Club. It was easier that way than to arrive when a crowd was already there. Waiting in the tennis pavilion for a game was a nondescript young man whose name she did not remember, and within three minutes of her arrival Diana had sent down a stinging service which made the young man realise that he had a fight on his hands. By the time her opponent had won the set 7—5, the courts were crowded, and Diana had slipped almost unnoticed into the life which revolved around the Club. Although it was a little surprising to find that the supposed invalid of yesterday was able to play a vigorous game of tennis today, everyone was so tactful that it made Diana want to laugh. She made an interesting discovery, too: that she was quite indifferent to what they thought.

Even the meeting with Maggie had been a success, which she had secretly dreamed of. And now she was here. Maggie was in the lounge of the club, sipping a mint with the Resident. Diana went immediately across to her. "Good afternoon," she said, embracing them both in the greeting. "It was so kind of you to invite me to stay with you when Jack went off," she continued, "but Daddy always used to quote a Dutch proverb which says that after five days fish and guests stink, and I decided not to take advantage of your kindness."

"We should have been delighted if you had come, my dear," said Maggie. "Truth to tell, we've been more than a little worried about you being in that bungalow all alone. Naturally, we assumed you were ill."

"No, I wasn't ill, Mrs Kennedy, just in a bad mood, and when I'm in a bad mood, I'm better alone. I'm afraid poor Jack found me quite impossible to live with and must have been delighted at the excuse to go off on patrol. By the way," she added, turning to the Resident, "when is he returning? Have you any news?"

"A runner came in this afternoon with a message to the effect that he'll be here tomorrow, or at latest, the day after. If that young man isn't careful," the Resident continued with heavy jocularity, "he'll be getting promotion soon. He's done a very fine job out there, but I'll let him tell you the details himself."

When, after a few minutes of verbal sparring, which Hugh Kennedy did not notice, Diana left them, Maggie had the uncomfortable feeling that she had met her match. The meeting had not gone at all according to plan. Instead of being sheepish and on the defensive, Diana had been perfectly self-possessed and quite positive in the assertion of her right to solitude without feeling called upon to explain it.

"Nice girl that!" remarked Kennedy. "Brains, breeding, poise!"

"What you really mean," snapped Maggie, "is that she has a fine figure and shows as much of it as she dare. Your

anatomical studies and deal with the features which reveal brains and breeding.

Hugh Kennedy wondered mildly at the timour in his wife's voice. He liked and admired Diana and was beginning to sense that Maggie did not. In his innermost heart he deplored Maggie's insistence upon "owning" people. The one sure way to her good graces was a kind of moral surrender. To those who unburdened their souls to her, Maggie was a kind friend, wise and loyal adviser, but it seemed that her charity was not so wide as to embrace those who walked alone and those who, finding themselves unhappy and in trouble, were reluctant to bare their souls to the vulgar gaze. The realisation of these things about his wife made Hugh Kennedy uncomfortable. He had an idea that in assuming the rôle of universal mother, Maggie was usurping some of the functions of God. Diana was one of Maggie's failures. Maggie would be unable to forgive this.

Hugh Kennedy, in common with many Englishmen, gave the appearance of being much less observant than he really was. It was in many ways a useful trait, for it enabled him to observe what he wanted to observe and to appear not to have noticed anything when it suited his convenience. This little peculiarity had served him well during his official life because an official who is *known* to have observed certain irregularities is bound to do something. Kennedy observed now that, hovering in the background, longing to speak to Diana, was that pleasant young man John Hudd, so he invented on the spur of the moment some reason for talking to him and bringing him into the circle. When, a few minutes later, he had brought John and Diana into such close contact that they could no longer ignore one another, he discovered urgent business elsewhere. He did this rather with the air of a naughty boy, for he knew that Maggie would observe it and would resent any other hand than hers moving the pawns. Not for the first time, he wished fervently that they had had children of their own, for he was convinced that Maggie would have been a wonderful mother to them.

Meanwhile, in his quiet paternal way, John Hudd was telling Diana that he had returned, and if the words did not carry much conviction, the devotion which shone from his eyes did.

"I suppose," said Maggie acidly as she and her husband walked back to the Residency, "you want to see that girl break poor John's heart."

"John is a fine young man, Maggie, and if she sees enough of him, I think there's good chance that Diana will learn it for herself. The risk of breaking his heart is one he'll have to run. Healthy young men take that in their stride. Anyway, a broken heart is better than an atrophied heart, my dear. Don't you agree?"

Maggie did not reply, but before she went to bed that night she wrote a long letter to a friend in Singapore, a letter in which she asked several pertinent questions.

Cats will eat their kittens rather than allow them to be loved by a stranger. The Spanish Inquisitors were completely sure of their moral rightness when they said to their victims: "Accept the Truth as we see the Truth, or burn for heresy." Maggie felt rather like a chess player who discovers that two of his pawns are self-propelled and are spoiling a game. Her moral indignation was great.

IV

DIANA was going to strange springs in order to quench her thirst for life. One of her chief pleasures was to do the daily marketing, which all the other womenfolk left to their servants. Instead of the aimless early-morning canter round The Green, she found it more pleasant to ride down the coast road a few miles and, on the return journey, buy the fish, meat, vegetables and fruit needed at home. This involved a daily chat with Chow-li, for the store was always empty at these times. Diana liked Chow-li, liked him for

himself, and also because, however tenuous, he was a link with Jules.

Chow-li's ramifications throughout the peninsula were a matter of common knowledge in Fort Mallet. Friends, relatives, correspondents and business associates kept him informed of the smallest happenings over an area much larger than Europe. On one of her morning visits, Diana was amazed when Chowli let her know he was aware of Jules's death by saying: "Ol' fr'en' in Padang send me bad' news. Chow-li ve'y sorry."

The old Chinese also knew, long before the news was common property in the Fort, that Adrian Hornby had got himself into trouble in Singapore, while a full week before Jack Maynard heard the news officially, Chow-li told Diana that Hornby had been acquitted of the charges preferred against him, because a clever defence lawyer had made two of the prosecution's chief witnesses contradict one another.

In his own subtle and unostentatious fashion, Chow-li let Diana know that he was her friend and that in him she possessed eyes and ears which missed little. In this remote and alien place she found the knowledge strangely comforting.

In addition to the daily marketing, another routine task had devolved upon Diana. Jimmie had gone on hunger strike, refusing all food and behaving towards McCloskey as though he were a complete stranger. At the end of forty-eight hours of starvation, McCloskey, fearing for the ape's life, asked Diana to coax him with food.

Jimmie required no coaxing. From her hand he took and ate a durian ravenously, following this with a bunch of bananas. But from that moment onwards he would accept food from nobody else. Indeed, his aversion from McCloskey was such that if the latter were in sight at feeding time, Jimmie obstinately refused to eat. His education, meanwhile, came to a standstill, for Diana refused, despite the doctor's pleading, to have anything more to do with it. Nevertheless, she welcomed the task of feeding Jimmie twice daily, hoping

that she would be able to persuade Mr. Gloskey to liberate him. But she was not strong enough to make life the thrilling, daring, exciting time it should have been to a girl of Diana's vivacious temperament. Time hung heavily on her hands.

John Hudd behaved impeccably towards Diana. He sensed that during her absence from Fort Mallet she had been through some tremendous experience, which had shaken her to her foundations, but he had no idea of its nature, nor did he seek to learn anything from her. He was a frequent visitor to the Maynard bungalow, played tennis and golf with Diana and was always, unobtrusively, in evidence.

It was in Chow-li's store early one morning that Diana had the encounter which she had been dreading. A voice behind her said: "So, it is here, in deep converse with the estimable Chow-li, that I find the ewe-lamb which has strayed from the flock."

She turned to find the penetrating eyes of Father Courtenay looking at her. There was such kindness and understanding in them that she at once became ashamed of her tears. "Half of me has wanted to call on you, Father," Diana said frankly, "and the other half was frightened to."

"There is no need to be frightened of me, child. Although a priest, I am not as censorious as I ought to be. My besetting sin is a lax tolerance for weakness wherever I find it. Call upon me at teatime one day—today if you will—and I promise you that you shall choose the topics of conversation. This will enable you to avoid whatever may be on your conscience. Is it a bargain?"

At four-thirty the same afternoon Diana poured tea for Father Courtenay in a shady corner of the garden at the Jesuit Mission. "And now," said her host, producing a letter from his pocket, "in order to prove what an artful, unreliable vessel I am, I shall proceed to break the promise I made you. My good sister sends you her blessing. Furthermore, she speaks well of you. I will read you what she says:

How strange that I should meet Diana Maynard in such a far-off place. I never really liked her because she was truthful and fearless, but always feared for her because, in something which I find difficult to put into words, hers gave me the impression of being a troubled soul. She ranks as one of my failures, by which I mean that I believe I failed to make any impression upon her. Her self-reliance was hard to shake. But she was a good girl and we loved her. Give her my blessing and my love. Sister Josephine, whom Diana will remember, joins me and asks me to say that she has never ceased to pray for her.

That, let me tell you, from my good sister, is high praise. Now, having delivered my message, let us talk of other things."

"Thank you, Father. I will write to her. I knew she always regarded me as one of her failures, but it is nice to know that she thought so kindly of me. I loved her, even though I was a bit scared of her. She was a very formidable old lady . . . and one had the feeling that nothing was hidden from her."

"She has the audacity, let me tell you, to apply to me the adjective 'worldly'. She deplores the amount of time I devote to extra-ecclesiastical matters. I always tell her in reply that no man can begin to understand God's infinite wisdom who has not explored some of the secrets of Nature and the Universe."

"I think that, too," said Diana. "People say that the scientists are enemies of religion, but surely the greatest scientist alive must feel terribly humble in the face of the wonders he uncovers? I think that any man or woman who feels truly humble when looking at a flower, watching insects at work, or gazing up into the stars at night, is really engaged in worship."

"As a priest, I doubt if I can reconcile it with my conscience to agree with you, but in my heart I believe that you are right. The true scientific approach to any problem demands that nothing—absolutely nothing—be taken for

granted. Where a priest is concerned this is difficult, for there is always the temptation to explain the inexplicable by saying airily and most unscientifically, that this or that phenomenon is merely another of God's wonders. Now there was a time when almost all scientific research was in the hands of priests, but that time has passed and the laymen in most fields have outstripped the priest-scientist, with the result that the priesthood generally has suffered a decline in prestige. The effect of all this upon me is that I am become a kind of Jekyll and Hyde. As a scientist I begin by making no premature admission of God's existence, but I find invariably that I reach a point in my enquiry where certain phenomena are explicable only in terms of God. When I was a young man I studied astronomy under a great man, a professed atheist, but during the years of our association he impressed me as being one of the most devoutly religious men I have ever known, and it was this quality of humility in him which brought me to the conclusion."

"I wish all priests were as easy to talk to as you are, Father," said Diana slowly.

"Don't let my liberal doctrines deceive you, child. I use them merely to bait the trap. You are now nibbling the bait. The next time you come to see me, we will spring the trap. We will, for example, discuss how it is that you left here some weeks ago a brilliantly beautiful but callow and self-opinionated girl, and you return, still beautiful but bearing the scars of the experience which has turned you into a young woman grown somewhat humble and, I fear, more than a little sad. But, as I say, we will discuss these things next time you come, so that when you walk into the trap which I shall prepare for you, you will do so with eyes wide open and you will not be able to reproach me with being a crafty Jesuit, which of course, I am."

Diana left the Mission thoughtfully, wanting time to digest the impressions left by the talk with Father Courtenay. She had always felt a secret contempt for people who sought to shift the burdens of their sins and follies onto priestly shoulders, believing that this was not only too easy a way

out, but too inconclusive. She had always doubted the ability of priests when faced with worldly problems. In her experience it had seemed as though they fell into the temptation of over-simplifying human difficulties, prescribing for them remedies which were too highly stylised and systematised. She was not in the mood for trite homilies and banal generalities.

Walking slowly across to the Club, Diana was acutely aware of the shifting sands of doubt and indecision which made clear thinking so difficult. Only penitents went to priests for absolution of their sins, so the kind of help she might receive from Father Courtenay would probably be premised upon a penitence which she did not feel. There was not one minute of any hour she had spent with Jules Duvivier which now occasioned her the smallest pang of regret. There was not a moment which, in the retrospect, looked cheap or tawdry. If Jules could be conjured back to life, she knew she would gladly, joyously, relive every moment with him. Nothing had happened of which, deep in her innermost being, she felt ashamed. She was not prepared to express a penitence she did not feel.

But Jules was gone, beyond recall. Life had to be lived now without his gentle mockery, his gay laughter and the surging tides of passion he had been able to arouse in her. All Diana's capacity for love had been concentrated upon Jules as a magnifying glass concentrates the rays of the sun into a burning spot of heat. Now the focus of the glass was shifted. The focal point of heat no longer existed, the glass merely shedding a mild warmth over a larger area. Life, Diana believed, had to have a positive reason and there was no longer any reason. Somewhere, somehow, a reason must be found, or the drab monotone of existence would become intolerable and not worth the pain. If, before comfort were given, God demanded that she forswore Jules, expressed regret for her unhallowed relationship with him, then God was demanding more than she was prepared to give.

The trouble was that everything and almost everybody wore to Diana the garb of the second rate. She had soared

among the dizzy peaks of human passion, so that the undulating foothills of mechanics, etc., etc.

Perhaps, though, as she did, she was the last person on earth who could help, but there was nobody else to whom Diana could turn. For the first time in her adult life she felt herself completely unable to make any clear-cut decision. Her brother, Jack, she had long ago dismissed. If he could, Diana knew that he would help her to the best of his capacity, but that capacity, she believed, was pitifully small. Jack Maynard had very little worldly wisdom of the kind she needed.

For Diana the easiest thing in her present mood would have been to devote her life to good works, giving to all humanity the love which she could no longer give to one man. But even as she turned the thought over in her mind, an innate realism told her that this was nonsensical and cowardly. There were already too many men and women who, having made failures of their own lives, deemed themselves fitted to direct the lives of others, sublimating their natural urges down unnatural and uncharted avenues and achieving essentially nothing except the vicarious and quasi-holy joy of meddling in affairs which they did not understand and using human beings as guinea-pigs in their wanton experiments. The world called them reformers.

That same evening, acting upon impulse, Diana wrote a letter, instructing a servant to deliver it at once:

Dear Father Courtenay:

During the few months I shall remain here I have not enough to occupy my mind. It occurs to me that I might be helpful to you in your work. I can write clearly, as you see, and am quick and accurate with figures. I would be glad to devote some hours daily to anything which would really help. I leave it to you to let me know.

Yours sincerely,
DIANA MAYNARD

P.S. I mean by the above that I would like to help in matters outside your Mission activities.

The following afternoon a boy brought a reply:

Dear Miss Maynard,

I accept your offer of help gladly and with gratitude.
Please come and discuss it with me as soon as convenient.

Your postscript was not necessary for, as we both know, you are not qualified to help in the work of the Mission. If you know how to use a typewriter, you will be invaluable.

Yours sincerely,

RANDOLPH COURtenay, S.J.

The neatness of the rebuke contained in the letter left Diana in no doubt as to who would be the loser in a battle of words.

V

FORT MALLET's most popular social function, which occurred at least twice annually, was an all-day picnic on one of the islands which lay a few miles off the coast. The day always chosen was a Sunday, when almost everyone was free. The only abstainers among the white community were the Goslings (Mrs Gosling considered the picnic a desecration of the Sabbath); Father Courtenay, because he was too busy; one police officer and one of the operators at the wireless station. On the particular Sunday with which this story is concerned, another abstainer was Adrian Hornby, who had returned quietly from Singapore some days previously and whom nobody had seen.

Some forty-five minutes after leaving the Port, the Residency launch, pre-empted for the occasion, arrived abreast of an island of atoll-like formation, being merely an elliptic sand-spit a mile in circumference and not more than a hundred yards in width at any point. Within it was enclosed a lagoon, land-locked except for a narrow entrance some

fifteen yards wide, through which the launch's blunt nose pushed slowly. It was an idyllic scene. A fringe of coconut palms provided shade, while the turquoise-blue water was crystal clear and of great depth. This and the other islands were uninhabited, except briefly by fisherfolk.

A few hearty souls tried to organise a game of water polo, but this quickly died of inanition. There was talk of swimming races, but these too came to nothing. Everybody preferred to laze. The Resident, looking parboiled, lay floating on his back, belly several inches out of the water and wearing a swim-suit of blue and white stripes. A few people slept unashamedly in the shade, some lay comatose in the shallows, while a few adventurous souls swam in the mild surf on the seaward side of the island, where man-eating sharks were known to lurk. Maggie Kennedy's efforts to persuade her husband to recall these people to safety were unavailing. "On occasions like these," the Resident impressed on her, "I have no authority and to attempt to exert any would be extremely bad taste on my part."

Until the swimmers had returned and were sitting at the trestle tables waiting for lunch to be served, Maggie Kennedy clucked irritably. She had no patience with her husband's mild use of authority. "Supposing one of them was taken by a shark! How would you feel then?" she asked. "I should regret it deeply, my dear," he replied, "just as I should regret it deeply if one of them were to develop an ingrowing toenail. But in both cases my responsibility would be nil. Let me ask you a hypothetical question. How do you suppose I would feel if I were to interfere and call these young men back, only to have a coconut drop on the head of one of them?"

"Now you're just being stupid, Hugh," snapped Maggie. "The chances of a coconut dropping on one of their heads are too small to be discussed. . . ."

"How many people have you known to be taken by man-eating sharks here?" asked the Resident, ending the argument. "Try to enjoy yourself, my dear, instead of dwelling on horrors."

One of the features of these picnics was supper by the light of a driftwood fire. The pattern of the picnics had been set long before Kennedy's time and nothing short of bad weather was ever permitted to change the pattern. Tradition demanded that during the hours of daylight the Union Jack be flown from a small mast brought specially for the purpose; that one dish at lunch be a salad made from coconut cabbage; that the *pièce de résistance* be a gigantic cold chicken pie; that the gathering of the driftwood for the fire be done by the members of the picnic party and not by the servants; and lastly, that someone should make a speech.

John Hudd, as Diana feared he would, chose that day to propose again. As the sun touched the horizon, before plunging into the sea, they crawled out of the water at a point several hundred yards from the rest of the party. Diana at the moment was hardly aware of her companion's presence. Her mind was a thousand miles away. It was sunset on Toba. She and Jules were just climbing from the dark water and, standing on deck, their bodies were suffused with the soft red light before the sun hid behind the mountains and the purple shadows came down the valleys to spread across the lake. For a few moments it was possible to relive the happiness of those carefree days and nights. When the harsh reality of facts reminded Diana that those days were gone beyond recall, her body was shaken by a sigh which became a sob. She turned to find John, adoration in his eyes, looking at her.

He had been silent for a long while, but now words came tumbling from his lips as though pent-up waters had burst a dam. To Diana the words scarcely registered. She heard them, but they meant nothing. It was from their tone and from the urgency in his voice that she knew what they meant.

When at last he had unburdened himself and had relapsed into pleading silence, he stretched out his right arm to encircle Diana's shoulders, withdrawing it as he felt a convulsive shiver run through her. It was, he would have realised had he stopped to think, an involuntary gesture,

but it was so pregnant with disgust that he recoiled as though he had been struck. "What can I ask in a horror-stricken voice? An impulsive thought as all that?"

"You took me by surprise, John. I'm sorry it seemed like that to you. I'm—I'm not used to being touched, I suppose."

"You flinched from me—in disgust. You make me feel as though I am unclean. I didn't know," John continued, "that you felt like that about me. If I had known I wouldn't have pestered you—ever."

"I like you, John, like you enormously. You don't disgust me, as you seem to think. But liking isn't enough, John. You must see that it isn't." Even as she spoke, Diana knew that she was wasting words. The harm had been done. It was not possible to tell him the truth, for the truth was that he had disgusted her. There was still goose-flesh all over her body from the touch of his hand. But what John did not know and could not know was that there was nothing personal about it. He did not disgust her because he was who he was, but because he was not Jules Duvivier. Any man's caressing hand would have had the same effect.

These days, in moments of perplexity, Diana often paused to consider what Jules, if he were alive, would think and say. She did so now and the answer was not long in coming. Jules, she knew, would stress the need for being kind. That was it. To Jules the most important thing in life was kindness, so she, too, would be kind.

On the other side of the island, across the so-called lagoon, they were lighting the driftwood fire. Hugh Kennedy's rather high-pitched voice could be heard, telling a story, which was followed by a ripple of dutiful laughter.

"I'll go now," said John in a cold, dead voice. "You can't miss the way if you swim towards the fire."

"Don't go, John, please don't go," said Diana gently. "Whatever happens, we mustn't quarrel. I don't know, John, whether I shall ever marry you or not, but I'm proud that you asked me. Will you believe that? I've been through a bad time lately. I can't talk about it, John. Mentally, don't you see, I'm not fit now to make such an important

decision—the most important. I don't know what I want. I like you, I trust and respect you. ~~Believe me~~ I promise, is true. But I don't love you. I don't love anyone. But don't let us quarrel. I'll feel better soon and then we can talk some more."

"I think I understand, Diana, but I don't ever want to see disgust in your eyes. I don't think I could bear that."

"You won't, John, you won't."

In a locked drawer at home there lay a sealed envelope. On it was written in Jules's spidery handwriting "Diane". Underneath this, in the handwriting of Dr De Boer, had been added: "Not to open please until three months after the death of Mr Duvivier."

The three months was not yet over, but Diana, who had up to this time dreaded the ordeal of opening it, now found herself wishing the time would pass. In some strange fashion she did not understand she felt as though this time of waiting was a period of suspended animation. She had given herself with whole heart to Jules. He had accepted the gift of her and although he was now gone, he had not returned the gift. She still belonged to him and that being so, she could not make any decision. The letter, she now began to feel assumed the importance of what the lawyers would call a Deed of Release. Meanwhile, Diana believed, her position was that of a slave—a willing slave, but a slave no less—on whom would soon be conferred the gift of freedom. Like many another slave before her, Diana wondered whether she would feel lost and afraid without her chains.

Changed and merged into the group around the trestle tables in the firelight, Diana found herself shrinking from the banality of chicken pie and polite laughter.

By mischance Diana found herself seated next to Maggie Kennedy. "We were trying a few minutes ago," said the latter, "to remember the name of that handsome young Frenchman who comes here from time to time to buy pearls. The last time he was here you danced with him, I remember. What was his name, my dear?"

There was no malice, or ~~arrogance~~, in the question and Diana ~~realised~~ it was just ~~injustice~~ that had there been she knew she would have lost control of herself.

"His name was Jules Duvivier, Mrs Kennedy," replied Diana without hesitation, for to have hesitated would have been to deny Jules.

"Yes, that's it. How clever of you to remember!"

"Not really," said Diana easily. "In the short while I knew him he made a great impression on me. I thought him quite the most—civilised man I have ever met."

Diana felt wonderfully elated as she said this. It seemed so right to say boldly what she believed to be true about Jules. She felt proud that she alone of all these others had really known him and was ready, if the need arose, to champion him. There was an arrogant tilt to Diana's chin as she waited to hear whether any contrary opinion would be expressed. But she waited in vain, hoping that Jules had heard.

VI

THE land lay under the curse of drought. Usually, there was too much rain. The restful verdance of The Green was gone, burned to the shade of a faded khaki shirt. As Maggie Kennedy walked across from the Club to the Residency, her feet scuffed up clouds of fine dust, which hung in the tortured air like puffs of steam from a locomotive. Nobody was abroad in the noonday heat. Maggie herself would have been in the cool green of her garden, where water from a natural spring was always available, but for the fact that it was mail day and she had elected to read her mail in the Club before going home to the midday meal.

Instinctively, on passing the gate of the Maynard bungalow, she paused, for her thoughts while crossing The Green had been of Diana, whose name had figured largely in two

of the letters she had just read. One had contained a detailed account of the ugly quarrel between Adrian Hornby and Colin Peregrine, as a result of which the former was still in hospital. The former's acquittal on a technicality, apparently, ranked as a scandal in Singapore, although from the evidence there was some doubt as to who had begun the trouble. Diana's name had not been mentioned in Court, but it had emerged in evidence that the quarrel had concerned a woman. But, since everyone in Singapore knew the identity of the woman, the gallantry of those who had suppressed her name had achieved little except the satisfying of convention. Maggie's correspondent, *en passant*, said that Hornby had done what many men in Singapore had been tempted to do, and that the injured man would receive scant sympathy.

Another letter mentioned that Diana had been observed dancing and sailing with "that handsome young Frenchman, Duvivier, whom I met two years ago at the Fort Mallet Club."

A third correspondent, who merely knew that Maggie had met Jules Duvivier, and did not know anything about Diana, sent a marked copy of an English-language newspaper published in Medan, which recorded the sad death of this "well-known and popular young Frenchman as the result of a motor-car accident near Toba Meer."

With these pieces of the jigsaw puzzle in her possession, it was a simple task for Maggie Kennedy to reconstruct most of the others from her imagination, and she was engaged in this task as she thoughtfully walked across what had once been The Green.

There were moments, and this was one of them, when Maggie's thought processes were—no matter how derogatory to herself—completely honest. She knew at this moment that if Diana, hurt, bewildered and grief stricken, as she must have been when she returned to Fort Mallet, had only come to her—Maggie—and poured out the sad story into her lap, there were almost no limits to what she would have been impelled to do to comfort and re-orientate

her. Instead of this, Diana had chosen to rebuff Maggie Kennedy, keep her alarm's length even to the length of open defiance and insolence as typified by the episode of the binoculars and the bamboo screen. She knew, of course, that there were people, plenty of them, who were constitutionally unable to 'wear their hearts upon their sleeves' and felt bound by some inner discipline to solve their own problems. With such people, as Maggie well knew, there was something indecent about the idea of exposing grief to the public gaze, some compulsion which sealed their reticence. She knew all this and more, yet she too had her little peculiarities, and these in their turn were largely uncontrollable. The chief of these was that to hide one's troubles from Maggie Kennedy was to put oneself outside the pale of Maggie Kennedy's sympathy. It was not just, as she knew, but justice had nothing to do with it. It was another way of saying that the famous milk of human kindness—for which Maggie herself was famous—flowed only in the face of abject surrender to Maggie Kennedy. It was conditional and, since love is unconditional, and love is just another name for charity, hers was at best a synthetic charity and at worst something so ugly that only Freud could find a name for it.

Probably, and as almost always is the case, the truth lay somewhere between these poles, but there was no escaping from the conclusion that Maggie Kennedy's love for humanity was not the wide and all-embracing thing her admirers were sometimes tempted to believe it was.

At the Residency, Maggie found her husband waiting for her somewhat irritably. The meal they shared was a gloomy one. The intense heat and the shocking condition of The Green were, his wife thought, responsible for Hugh Kennedy's seething mood. This was only partly true and it was not until teatime, after a troubled siesta, that the true cause emerged.

In reply to Maggie's question, "Anything interesting in the mail?" the Resident snapped: "Something dashed unpleasant and embarrassing, and if you'll put down those

damned field glasses. I'll tell you about it. Good God! From the way you see those things one would think you were a naturalist, looking bugs under a microscope."

When the offending glasses were safely hidden in the workbag, Hugh Kennedy began to unburden himself of the cause of his discontent. A letter had come that morning from Higher Authority, couched in frigid tones. "They want to know, if you please, why I allowed that young lunatic Hornby to leave here without warning the authorities in Singapore that he was dangerous. It seems that in a quarrel over some woman he half-killed a fellow at one of the clubs. Somehow—I don't know how—they've got hold of the story of his assaulting young Hudd here, and they're trying to hold me responsible for his acts. They ask me why I allowed the charges against the fellow to drop here. . . ."

"Why did you drop the charges, Hugh, since we are on the subject?" asked Maggie blandly.

"For several reasons, which still seem good enough to me. First, the fellow was sufficiently punished when he had that fall and bashed in his face. Second, young Hudd was decent enough not to want to press any charges. Third, well, I suppose I didn't want any needless upset over what was, essentially, a trifling matter, and . . ."

"And what else, Hugh?" asked Maggie, noting her husband's reluctance to continue.

"Well," he replied uneasily, "I suppose the truth of it is that I wanted to spare the Maynard girl the embarrassment of a Court hearing. One side or the other would have been compelled to call her as a witness . . . and, well, since the poor girl wasn't to blame, it seemed pretty hard that she should be the sufferer."

"I wonder," said Maggie lightly, controlling herself with difficulty, "whether any woman is blameless when men start fighting over her. Men don't assume proprietorial airs unless they are encouraged, Hugh."

"The fact is that you don't like the girl. . . ."

"You're talking nonsense, Hugh. I do like her, but I confess that I don't like her sufficiently well to see your

career jeopardised by protecting her from the consequences of her own"—she fumbled a long while for the word—"thoughtless, shall we say.

"Who says that my career has been jeopardised?" asked Kennedy bristling.

"I don't know, Hugh, I haven't read the letter. I'd like to read it and then, perhaps, I shall be able to judge just how bad things are. How bad are they, Hugh?"

"Bad, Maggie, bad. I don't like the tone of the letter. It's barely polite. It's—it's the sort of letter one might write to an office boy accused of pinching stamps . . . and it's so damnably unfair. The fellow left here illegally and for an unknown destination. How was I to know that he'd skin out of here in a *prau* at night, or that he was making for Singapore?"

"Did you make any report when you did learn the facts, Hugh?"

"No, I didn't. They're holding that against me, too."

"Don't worry, Hugh. Maybe things will come right. Don't let it get you down. . . ."

Now that her husband had 'come clean', Maggie was all sympathy. He had conformed to her minimal demands and there was now nothing which lay in her power which she would not do to repair the harm done. Surely, Higher Authority could not be so brutal, so unjust, as to set aside as nothing the years of Hugh's loyal service because of one trifling error of judgment? But, even as she reassured herself thus, she knew that judgment—the instinctive knowledge of the right moment to do, or not to do, anything—was, apart from such things as integrity and loyalty, which were taken for granted, the prime quality essential in a man whose discretionary powers exceeded those of a modern king. Without judgment, a Resident became an empty bladder of wind, a feeble useless thing and a figure of fun.

Maggie Kennedy dismissed the ugly thoughts which came crowding in. "There's two weeks before the next mail goes, Hugh," she said soothingly, "and in that time we'll think of something."

That evening at the Club, watching Diana come in from tennis, looking flushed and radiant, Maggie Kennedy hoped that she was not showing the blind malignity she felt. It had been bad enough to be defied and deceived by the girl, but to have Hugh's whole career jeopardised because of her was unendurable. What a fool Hugh was, she mused, to allow a pretty face and figure to so warp his judgment!

VII

DIANA was finding Father Courtenay an exacting taskmaster, who behaved as though he were paying her a good salary for her time. "Within reason," he said at the beginning, "I don't mind when you come to work, but once the hours are fixed, I shall expect you to adhere to them."

After some thought, Diana decided that the most convenient hours for her would be from nine o'clock in the morning until noon. This would leave her free to do her marketing in the cool of the morning, permit her the luxury of an afternoon siesta, and allow time for golf or tennis in the late afternoon. So it was arranged.

The first few days were, Diana discovered after they were over, a period of probation. Father Courtenay set her at dreary routine tasks for the purpose of checking her accuracy. Finding that she could use a typewriter and, furthermore, possessed her own portable machine, he proceeded to clear up arrears of correspondence with a vast number of people scattered all over the world. As Diana knew no shorthand, he dictated rough notes to her, which she took down in abbreviated longhand, marvelling as she did so at the multiplicity of his interests and the range of his knowledge. A few of the letters were to members of his own order engaged, like himself, in scientific pursuits. Other letters were concerned with such diverse subjects as meteorology, which was his prime interest; his own process of

manufacturing a cheap laminated board for building purposes, which acted as an insulator of sound and heat, and on which he had wide patches, a new type of gramophonic record whose grooves ran like the figure '8'; and an exchange of information with ornithologists, botanists and other scientists all over the world.

Father Courtenay's attitude during working hours was one of courteous aloofness. If he felt gratitude for Diana's voluntary work, he did not show it. To him, she concluded, there was no need for anything of the kind. His own work, which began before dawn, and continued until late in the evening when he was too tired to do any more, was done without pecuniary or other reward. Money which accrued to him from various publications, from sundry patent royalties and other sources, all went to the funds of his own order, or to scientific and charitable foundations in which he was interested. He had only two personal extravagances outside his work: the occasional glass of claret which he drank with his meals, and clothing of unusually fine texture.

There was only one period during working hours when Father Courtenay unbent at all towards his unpaid secretary and that was at 10 o'clock, when a Mission boy brought coffee. At this time he chatted on any topic which might be in his head, carefully avoiding religion, or anything having any personal significance for Diana. This way he made it clear to Diana that she was working for a scientist, who happened also to be a priest, but emphatically not for a priest who happened to have scientific interests and attainments. There was a subtle rebuke in the attitude which did not escape her.

There were times when Father Courtenay's cool, correct aloofness irritated Diana, but the more she saw of him and the more she was able to catch glimpses of his brilliant and versatile mind, the greater became her admiration of his qualities.

Lest the faintest breath of scandal should attach itself to their association in this predominantly Protestant community, their work was always done in a room which, when

the shutters were drawn, looked westwards across The Green and whose ~~respective~~ ~~comers~~ ~~and~~ ~~full~~ ~~view~~ of any passer-by. "For myself I am indifferent," Father Courtenay explained to account for the lack of privacy in the arrangements, "but I have no right to be indifferent where the Order is concerned. We Jesuits have survived calumny, which would have destroyed lesser orders."

It was not until she had been working with Father Courtenay for nearly a month that Diana was satisfied in her mind that of all the human beings she knew, he alone possessed the worldly wisdom, the clear vision and impartiality of judgment which, if he would use them in her behalf, would help her. Strangely enough, her personal liking for him had diminished during the weeks of their association. She had sensed the drive and purpose of the man and, as it seemed, a certain intolerance of the feebleness of others.

"Father," said Diana at the end of a hard morning, "I would like some time—when it is convenient to you—to talk to you about my affairs . . . my difficulties. If you will help me, I will be very grateful."

It was not easy to say, but Diana was glad when it was out.

"It is, of course, as a priest you wish to talk to me?" came the reply. Father Courtenay cocked his black eyebrows quizzically.

"It is because you are a priest, Father, and also a wise man, that I need your help." Diana looked at him anxiously, hoping that he would not pounce upon her evasion.

"The priest," came the cool reply, "is always ready to help you. The man, I fear, has no time to spare."

Father Courtenay chose for their talk the shady grove at the clifftop where Diana had been the last person to see Albert Miller alive.

Diana spared herself nothing. She told Father Courtenay of her stay with the Hammonds, the chance meeting with Jules Duvivier after her humiliation at the hands of Colin Peregrine and the trip to Sumatra. In telling of their two fabulous weeks on Toba together, she tried to keep out of

her voice the strange exaltation which the memory evoked, going on to tell of the drive back from Siantar, the failure of the car's brakes and the terrifying descent which had ended in the fatal injuries to Jules. ". . . and now, Father," she concluded, "I'm just lost. I don't seem to have any purpose in life. I've gone cold inside me. I want to build up my life again . . . Jules wants me to . . . but I can't. I don't care enough about anybody or anything to make the effort worth while. I've tried to tell you everything, Father, and I think I have. . . . I've come to you for help . . . advice."

"You loved this man who seduced you?"

"I loved him with all my heart, Father, but he didn't seduce me. If anything, I seduced him, but even that would not be quite true."

"I am satisfied," said the shrewd old priest, "that everything you have told me is true and that, consciously, you have withheld nothing. Although you are not in the confessional, that is important. But not one syllable you have uttered gives me the impression that there is any true repentance in you."

"That is true, Father. I don't regret one moment of the days and nights I spent with Jules. I won't lie to you and pretend otherwise. There is nothing I did with Jules that I wouldn't do again—proudly. It is because I feel like that, won't you understand, that life seems to have come to an end."

Diana looked anxiously at her companion. The fear was in her heart that her defiant admission would alienate his sympathy. Although she was not to know it, her attitude had the opposite effect. Father Courtenay during his long life had had more than enough of mealy-mouthed sinners who, when their sins had found them out, slunk like whipped dogs to the confessional and, without any true repentance in their hearts, begged the solace of absolution. So many of them were like the dirty little sins they committed, shamefaced, furtive and pleading. This girl was different. There was no consciousness of having sinned, for

it was not in her to believe that anything done in great love could be sinful. There was no forgiveness without repentance, but then, the girl had mentioned forgiveness and, judging from her attitude, would reject it if offered to her. As a priest this put him in an impossible position.

"Yours, my child, I find a somewhat high-handed attitude," he said with a more kindly ring in his voice. "You want the comfort of the Church, it seems, but you are not prepared to submit to its discipline. What exactly is it you wish me to do for you? How can I help you? Also, I must tell you frankly, there is an inconsistency about you which I do not understand. You have demonstrated that you have courage and are self-reliant, but that does not go with a consuming fear which I detect in you. I cannot help you if I know only half your story."

"I *am* frightened, Father, desperately frightened. But it is all so vague that I did not like to tell you. . . . You see, I don't want you to think me a fanciful little fool."

"Don't try to anticipate my interpretations of what you are going to say, but say it, all of it, no matter how foolish it may sound."

"You said something to me months ago, Father, when you were telling me and Mr Gosling about storms, something I've never been able to forget. It is because of that, I think, that I realised how much you understand about—people. You said to me: 'I detect in you a soul wandering aimlessly in the vortex of a storm.' Then, a little after that, when I told you, half laughing, that I wasn't a very stormy person, you said: 'The typhoon at its centre has always a patch of calm . . . a candle will burn there without flickering. . . . Do not count too much on this tranquillity of yours.' Do you remember, Father?"

"Yes, I remember very well, but I also remember that what I said was in a mood of—levity. There was nothing profound, nor any hidden meaning. It is tragic to think what I said then has troubled you."

"What you said then, Father, was something I was already beginning to believe, without being able to put it so

neatly into words. Even as a child I have often had that strange feeling of being ~~quitter~~ while a storm raged all round me."

"What has all this to do with your fears and troubles?"

"Just this, Father, that I am thinking of myself as I would think of a storm, bringing unhappiness and destruction to others. So much has happened, Father, that I am almost tempted to believe that I bring misfortune to people, as though—as though there were a curse on me."

Father Courtenay was prompted to speak, but remained silent, his keen eyes fixed upon Diana.

"I'm not bad, Father, bad in my heart, I mean. I don't hate people and wish them harm. I don't lie about people, or envy them so that I get bitter. I think that is true."

"Here in Fort Mallet it began when I used to play golf with John Hudd and Adrian Hornby. They were nice boys and I liked being with them, but I never had a talk with either of them that might not have been in public. Then, as you know, they broke their friendship and I suppose everyone knew that it was because of me. It ended with the terrible scene in the Club . . . two old friends, lying in the same hospital and refusing to speak. It isn't any good hedging about it: I *was* the cause of it."

"You have probably heard what has happened to Adrian, poor boy. He may have ruined his whole life—because of me. Now I'm frightened of what will happen to John, who is very unhappy. He wants to marry me and I don't want to marry him."

"But I'm getting ahead of my story, Father. I went to Singapore, to stay with Molly Hammond, my oldest friend. She knew your sister, too. It wasn't long before I realised that her husband was more interested in me than he should have been. He wanted to pick a quarrel with his partner, a man named Peregrine, because of me. His partner is a disgusting creature, who behaves like an animal in a farmyard. Molly, who knew that if the partnership broke up, her husband would be ruined, laid a trap for me . . . and I fell into it."

While Diana was reciting the ugly details of the night spent at sea with ~~Pere~~ Father ~~Countenay~~, Father's eyes glinted with anger.

"I spent some awful days alone in Singapore," Diana continued, "and then I met Jules again. He was so kind, Father. His behaviour was immaculate. With him I felt as though I were in a safe harbour, sheltering from a storm. . . . And now, Father, I am haunted by the thought that it was I who led Jules to his death. If it had not been for that chance meeting in Singapore, Jules would probably be back in Paris and none of this would have happened."

"Now you are being foolish, child. You are picking on one link in a chain of causation and trying to build up a fanciful theory from it. Why not blame Duvivier's agent in Padang for sending him the telegram which caused the change in plans? Why not, if you will, blame the men who found the pearls which Duvivier went there to see? Why not, indeed, blame God for having made the pearls? That kind of thinking leads nowhere, child, except to the mad-house."

"I have tried to think like that, Father. I would like to believe that I am being utterly, foolishly wrong. But I can't . . . too much has happened. Jules was very wise, although he was young. He saw a lot of things before they happened. He knew before he died how empty my life would be without him and he begged me to find some man and marry him. Jules told me that he would never be jealous."

"I think your Jules gave you good advice. If you were to marry some decent man, have a family and lead a normal life, your worries and doubts would vanish."

"But Father," said Diana with a wail of anguish, "you don't understand . . ."

"What don't I understand?"

"I couldn't marry *any* man, Father. I can't bear even to be touched by a man. I used to love dancing, but I can't any more. I want to scream if a man touches me. But even if I didn't feel this physical disgust, I could never bring myself to marry . . . because, you see, Jules is still with me

I feel him watching over me. I believe he can hear me now. . . ."

If Diana had been a scatter-brained, hysterical young woman, Father Courtney would have known what to do, for he would have known that she was merely in a phase which would pass. But in his dealings with Diana he had found that she had a good brain, could deal with facts logically and was not at all fanciful. Even if he could not bring himself to believe in her conclusions, he felt that she was being completely honest. Her distress was real. He was tempted to say to her that if she would come back under the sheltering umbrella of Mother Church, purge her conscience of her sins, then God would point a way out of her perplexities. While he sincerely believed this to be true, he could not say it, although to say it would be the easy way out for him.

One of the difficulties in his way was that he *knew* from his own observations that Diana did, without wishing to, and often without being aware of it, have a strange effect upon others. He was aware, for example, that because of her husband's tolerant attitude, Mrs Gosling had made the poor man's life well-nigh unbearable on more than one occasion. He was aware, too, through his keen perceptions, that Maggie Kennedy harboured less than charitable thoughts of Diana, believing he knew the reason. Strange things had been said to him in the confessional, things which tended to confirm, rather than deny, Diana's fears about herself. None knew better than he what havoc great beauty could cause in the hearts of those who beheld it, especially if its possessor were a wanton. But here was a girl who, aside from her one lapse from grace, gave the appearance of a strange chastity of outlook. It would be easy to allow the imagination a free rein and to build up a fanciful theory regarding Diana, but as a priest he shrank from anything of the kind. There were in his philosophy no mysteries, no supernatural, unexplained things, which were not, capable of explanation in terms of God's omniscience and omnipotence. Nevertheless, the facts were

disturbing. He remembered saying what he had to Diana, and now wished fervently that he had not, unthinkingly, planted in her mind the seed which was now become a strangling, choking vine of fear.

This, cool, aloof young woman, in whose eyes he could read something of her fear and anguish, did not behave like the syrens of mythology, deliberately luring men to destruction. Despite everything, she was, Father Courtenay believed implicitly, a good woman, in whom kindness, charity, forbearance and chastity were apparent and an integrated part of her. Chastity was, he believed, a state of mind and one lapse from chastity did not prove that a woman was essentially unchaste. It proved merely that she was human.

"You are asking a great deal of me," said Father Courtenay after a long silence. "In one sense it is my duty to tell you to return to the faith in which you were brought up, there to find absolution and comfort. That I do not do this is because the Church does not beg its erring children to share its blessings. It is for you, when there is humility in your heart, to be the suppliant. Until then I, the priest, can do nothing for you, except to pray that you will become less stiff-necked. . . ."

Father Courtenay, even as he uttered them, knew that these were just words, little more than windy platitudes of the kind that he deplored from others and despised from himself. They helped him stall for time to think. That was their only justification. The girl's fears for herself could not be dismissed thus airily. She was in real trouble, had come to him for aid, for advice. He wanted to help her, if only for the reason that she had come in honesty and simplicity of heart and had told the whole sorry story without glossing over inconvenient facts. He knew, too, that he himself had been on probation during the last weeks, watched, so that Diana might decide whether he was a worthy confidant. The knowledge had first amused and then annoyed him, but now, faced with her problems, he understood a little of her perplexity.

"What am I to do, Father? What am I to do?" There was the sharp edge of anxiety in Diana's voice.

"What do you feel impelled to do, child?"

"To end my life, Father. That is what I would like to do, but I won't do it, whatever happens, because that is the coward's way out of trouble . . . and I am not a coward."

It would have been easy for Father Courtenay, who had great skill with words, to have saved his own face by shifting the burden of it all on to other shoulders, merely offering his own services as an intermediary with God, but he was too honest and forthright a man to do this. Essentially, Diana's was a strictly mundane problem, which called for a mundane solution. She wanted to know how to order her life now that, in her eyes, there was no more reason for going on living. It was simple enough, but he felt unable to help. The sense of failure lay heavy upon him.

"I can't give you much comfort, child," he said at length. "I am trying and will go on trying to do something that is not easy—to separate the man from the priest. They have lived so long together that they have encroached on each other's limits . . . and I must have time to think. On one thing only can I help you now. Disabuse your mind of the belief that there is in you some mysterious power for evil. It is not true. Men have been attracted to your God-given beauty and have made fools of themselves. Their folly is to blame. Men have ruined themselves often enough to possess things of beauty, but that does not point to any inherent evil in beauty. Don't allow that thought to dwell in your mind, for it is wrong-headed and false."

"I have not studied the human mind from a scientific standpoint, but I would say to you that you are, and have been since this man died, in a highly emotional condition, a condition in which your judgment is not likely to be good. You have had a great shock. Perhaps the accident which was fatal to your lover, and in which you also were involved, did not leave you as scatheless as you believe. I urge you, therefore, to avoid making any important decisions of any kind until your life turns again upon a normal axis. A

decision made by you today is more likely to be bad than good.

"I know that all this ~~negative advice~~ is cold comfort, but it is the best I can give you. You are too intelligent to want a tarradiddle of high-flown nonsense and I will not insult you by offering it. As a man, I am at the end of my resources and it may well be that, as a priest, and after some thought, I shall be compelled to say to you: 'Put yourself in the hands of God.' We will talk of this again soon. . . . I wish I could do more for you."

"Thank you, Father," said Diana, rising to leave him. "You have been kind and patient. Above all"—she paused to choose her words—"thank you for not being—pontifical. I will remember what you have said and will try not to have foolish fancies."

Diana sensed as she left Father Courtenay some of his dismay at being unable to help her, but more than all, she was grateful to him for not having hidden behind a smoke-screen of words as so many people—including priests—were prone to do when confronted with problems beyond their capacity. She was not disappointed. She now knew what she had before suspected: that she would find within herself, or not at all, the solvent of her troubles.

Jules Duvivier was become something akin to a ghost, withal a kindly, benign and well-beloved ghost, who haunted every nook and cranny of Diana's body and soul. Before the resumption of a normal life was possible, Diana knew, she must lay the ghost. But—and this was the crucial point—she knew, that she did not want to lay his ghost. The memory of Jules, the caress of his voice, the laughter of his eyes, the ecstasy she had known in his arms; these she believed, even in the retrospect, had more power to give her joy than she could expect from any living person. Perhaps time, the 'great healer' of poem and song, would work its miracles and, in a few months or a few years, Jules would become a faintly glowing memory, which would obtrude itself into consciousness in moments of nostalgia. Meanwhile, there seemed to be only one certainty: nobody

else could help. There was no need now to go through the ordeal of baring her soul again. She and Jules were alone together again, alone as they had been during the splendid days they had known one another.

Father Courtenay *had* helped. It was good to remember the firm, confident way he had brushed aside her fears, dismissing as an absurdity the possibility that in some inexplicable way she was a harbinger of evil. There was real comfort in that. She had not sought the priest's clear intelligence in vain. These reflections helped Diana to believe that she had not allowed her fears to unhinge her own intelligence. She had doubted from the beginning whether Courtenay, the priest, had anything to offer but the vague abracadabra of his calling, just as she had believed implicitly that his good, incisive brain would see her problem with stark clarity. It was a strangely contradictory attitude on her part, she mused, to have so much faith in a man's good sense and intelligence and so little in the things which were the mainspring of his life.

VIII

FORT MALLET saw very little of John Hudd these days. He had even given up his room in the Mess. A planter for whom he acted as agent had been forced to take extended leave in a cool country, to shake off malaria which was in danger of becoming chronic. John Hudd, therefore, had taken over management from him, living upon the coconut property which was situated several miles down the coast in the opposite direction from Adrian Hornby's place. He divided his time between the office and his new responsibility.

John Hudd had seized the opportunity avidly, although it meant almost doubling his working hours. Now, from five-thirty in the morning, when he rose to start the work of the coconut plantation, until nine or ten o'clock at night, which

was the time he usually finished his desk work, every minute was fully occupied. He was glad. It meant less time to think about Diana, less time to weave plans for the future which in his heart he knew would come to nothing. Now, by the mysterious alchemy of heat and sweat and concentrated hard work, there was a chance to get Diana out of his system. At the Fort it had not been possible. He saw her walking or riding in the early morning. He saw her come down on various errands to Chow-li's store. He saw her at the Club in the evenings and every glimpse of her lithe body and lovely face had tended to stir within him longings which he knew to be vain. It was better this way, even though the loneliness of the life was crushing. In a few months Diana and her brother would leave Fort Mallet for New Zealand and, John Hudd was convinced, she would never return.

On the other side of Fort Mallet, living an equally lonely life, but whiling away some of its tedium with whiskey, lived Adrian Hornby, fast becoming a misanthropic drunkard.

Diana had some idea of the quantities of whiskey Adrian was consuming because, on her visits to Chow-li, the old Chinese merchant would sometimes point sadly to a pile of things which were being sent out to the Hornby estate. Prominent among them were always one or more cases of whiskey. Where Adrian was concerned, Diana felt her sense of guilt growing less. Guilt was really too strong a word, but there had always lingered a certain sense of responsibility, and now even this was going. In the court of her own conscience Diana had been able to acquit herself of being the means of bringing misfortune to others, and with this acquittal had come a strange sense of peace.

One day, at the end of a hard morning's work with Father Courtenay, she felt she owed it to him to tell him how much he had reassured her. She suspected, without being sure, that his failure to point the way to her had rankled. Her impulse, which did not fall far short of being patronising, sprang from an inner knowledge of the need to be kind. "I would like you to know, Father," she said in the moment of leaving the office, "that thanks to you I have got rid of

that foolish idea that I brought misfortune to people. I know now what nonsense it was. But, for a little while, it was terribly real."

Father Courtenay paused before replying. His brow knit briefly in perplexity. His lips moved as though he were about to speak, but had changed his mind.

"It is good to hear that, child," he said at length. "Such thoughts serve only to torture us. They belong to the outer darkness, where the pure light of day has never penetrated. . . . I have said nothing these last days, because I had nothing to say. . . . I reproach myself . . . bitterly that I had nothing to offer you. Yet it has seemed to me lately that you are happier, more sure of where you are going. I hope I am right."

"I am much happier, Father," said Diana with a bright smile. "I don't quite know why, but I am. I haven't been able to make up my mind about anything, but somehow I feel that my troubles will soon solve themselves and vanish. It isn't logical, I know, but then my fears weren't logical either. Somehow, Father, logic never seems to help at the moments when logic says it should. I'm beginning to understand why the word 'logic' seems almost naked without the adjective 'cold.' The only thing that seems to matter is that I am happier about—everything. The reasons don't matter at all. . . . I'm glad I've told you this, because you were kind and patient with me."

Father Courtenay stood for several minutes in thought while Diana went across The Green. He was conscious of a strange mal-ease. A devout man, to whom it never occurred to doubt that in God's hands lay the power to solve all human problems, he had, nevertheless, fought all through his life against the tendency he had remarked in other priests, to over-simplify God's beneficence. Water would not rise to its own level unless a proper channel were provided, God's power to spread happiness, likewise, was not apparent without a certain receptiveness to happiness. How otherwise to explain the mass misery of the world? Even as these thoughts turned over in his mind, he shook his

head with annoyance, for he was doing what he deplored in others: trying to answer an individual's perplexities in cosmic terms.

Diana's gesture had touched Father Courtenay. He had recognised it for what it was. While the element of patronage irritated him profoundly, its innate kindness was its justification. There was a nobility about it which made him feel a little humble, just as he felt that in his own attitude there was something cheap. This chit of a girl had turned her back upon Mother Church and, therefore, by implication, upon God. From what healing spring, then, had she drawn the faith, the courage and the arrogance to fight her battle alone and the serenity which now shone from her face, telling eloquently of faith in final victory?

Father Courtenay tried to console himself with the reflection that God extended mercy even to those who had renounced Him.

IX

THE Chinese merchants at the Port were the first to hear that the Resident was embroiled with High Authority because of his failure to take the proper steps at the time of Adrian Hornby's savage attack on John Hudd. The Fort would have been horrified to have known the closely guarded secrets which were the subject of common gossip in the building of the China Merchants' Guild. The Chinese communities throughout the Malay Archipelago had long since perfected a system of exchange of information. If John Smith moved from Macassar to Penang, his credit rating moved with him, and the Chinese merchants of Penang were able to assess his reliability to the last cent.

That Hugh Kennedy was in trouble and that retirement might be forced upon him was an item of first class importance. One retirement meant a chain of promotions. The

man who might come to replace him could be a friend or an enemy of the Chinese.

Since there was no reason to maintain secrecy regarding Hugh Kennedy's position, the story was allowed to leak. It percolated through the bazaar of the Port and thence, through clerks and house servants, to the Fort, where it became common property in the twinkling of an eye.

Jack Maynard heard it from a Malay subordinate one morning. He told Diana while they were eating their noon meal, wondering at the look of blank horror on her face when he had finished. "They're not being fair to Mr Kennedy," she protested. "It would have been inhuman of him to have sent Adrian to prison, or whatever they think ought to have been done."

"The law sometimes is a bit inhuman, Di. But if Adrian hadn't been such a damned fool as to beat up that chap Peregrine in Singapore, nothing more would have been heard of the matter. You knew Peregrine, didn't you? Shocking outsider from all accounts!"

"Yes, I knew him," replied Diana, relapsing into silence. She could not bring herself to tell her brother the sorry story.

"Well, I hope Kennedy isn't given the push," said Jack. "He's always been very decent to me."

"I hope so, too, Jack. He's a silly little man in some ways, but he's kind and nice. . . ."

Diana tried hard to conceal the distress she felt at the news, for there came the ugly thought that if this incident were going to cut short Hugh Kennedy's career, he had done what he had done, largely to spare her the ordeal of a trial and the attendant publicity. It would be a ghastly price to pay for such a trifling error of judgment and once again Diana felt a dead weight of responsibility settling on her shoulders.

In the Club that evening an impromptu dance was organised. The Kennedys, blissfully unaware that the story of their trouble was common knowledge, ran the gauntlet of many pairs of eyes, almost all of them sympathetic. Maggie,

it was evident from her haggard look, was worried, while her husband hid his worries behind a façade of false gaiety, which would have been convincing enough if these others had not known what they knew.

Hugh Kennedy greeted Diana with his customary gallantry, complimented her upon the pale blue voile frock she was wearing, and in chatting lightly with her, some of his tension and preoccupation seemed to vanish. Although the Resident's attitude was faintly ridiculous, withal quite harmless, Diana endured it because she believed that to talk to her gave him pleasure. He asked her for a dance, but she cried off on the plea that she was not feeling too well. It was impossible to tell him the true reason, which was that she could not bear to be touched by any man. "But you look positively radiant, my dear," said Kennedy. "A few turns round the floor will do us both good."

Diana was about to decline for the second time when Maggie Kennedy's voice cut in harshly: "You're putting Diana in a most difficult position, Hugh. After dancing with that young Frenchman, whose name I can't remember, how can you expect her to want to dance with you?"

The words alone were light enough, but the look which accompanied them told Diana all she wanted to know. It was Maggie's way of letting her know that she knew, if not everything, then a great deal. Her eyes were pin-points of malice.

At any other time Diana would have fallen to the temptation of making a sharp reply, but these days, more than ever before in her life, she was aware of the need for being kind. She never had liked and now never would like Maggie Kennedy, but she was able to see her through different eyes as a worried, harassed woman, anxious for her husband's future and, therefore, unduly sensitive, fearful, and not altogether in control of herself.

"It isn't that, Mrs Kennedy," Diana said mildly. "Ordinarily, I enjoy dancing with Mr Kennedy, but this evening I just don't feel up to dancing with anyone."

The Resident crossed the floor of the Club to claim

another partner, leaving his wife and Diana alone together. "I think," said Diana, professing not to see the hostility in the other's eyes, "as I'm not dancing I ought to relieve Dr McCloskey ~~at the piano~~. Poor man, he must be tired."

"You need not be afraid that I will ask you embarrassing questions, my dear, if that is the reason for your haste," said Maggie.

"No, Mrs Kennedy, the thought didn't cross my mind," replied Diana, looking frankly at the older woman. "There isn't one single question you could ask me which could cause me a moment's embarrassment. I made the excuse about relieving Dr McCloskey only because I know you don't like me and thought you would prefer me to go. Believe me, there wasn't any other reason."

This was said so simply and unaffectedly that it identified itself as the plain, unadulterated truth. It enraged Maggie to know that this cool, well-poised girl cared nothing for her good, or bad, opinion, but was merely polite because, being well-bred, politeness came naturally to her. Maggie's chest heaved, as though she were fighting for breath. Barbed, spiteful words were hovering on her lips and it was with a great effort that she recovered control of herself. "I'm sorry you dislike me so much, Mrs Kennedy," continued Diana, quite shocked by what she had seen. "For the future I'll try not to annoy you."

Diana walked over to the piano and sat down beside McCloskey. "I'll take over, if you like," she offered, "I'm sure you're dying for a drink."

McCloskey had already had plenty to drink and his tongue was loosened. He had witnessed the scene between Maggie and Diana, although he had heard nothing because of the noise of the piano. Surrendering the music stool, he went over to the bar to fetch a drink, returning to sit beside Diana, whose crisp touch, in contrast to his own slurred playing, seemed to give the dancers a new lease of life. The tempo of the entire Club seemed to accelerate.

Whether it was the music, or Diana's perfumed presence, McCloskey did not know, but he found his own thought

processes stimulated, like the movements of the dancers. His pulses beat faster, the nerve ends tingled; he felt more alive than he had felt for years, and the barriers of inhibition were falling fast. He wanted passionately to say to Diana all the things he had sworn never to say to another woman. The case-hardened cynicism, which for years he had worn as a protecting armour, was slipping from him.

For some fifteen minutes he sat beside Diana, watching her every movement hungrily, tortured by the slender curves of her body and weaving mad fantastic dreams around her, dreams which his intelligence told him were impossible of realisation, while the senses insisted that they were necessary for his own survival. He knew instinctively that Diana was aware of the struggle going on in him and in a little while he sensed that she was helping him fight his way back to sanity.

Strange, twisted thoughts began to push themselves to the forefront of McCloskey's consciousness. He began to see Diana as one dedicated, set apart for some special fate or privilege, under a *tabu* imposed by the gods themselves. Before coming to Fort Mallet, the doctor had spent a few years in Polynesia, where on more than one occasion he had come across *tabu* in its most primitive form. He remembered a lovely, golden-skinned girl in the Marquesas who lived under the strict ban of *tabu*, which forbade any man to touch her. The ban had become a part of the girl so that, even if it had been lifted suddenly, she would have remained elusive, untouchable. The girl had been smiling, friendly and charming, but her eyes had been dark, never reflecting the light. The film over them had seemed like the shutters drawn across the windows of a house in mourning. Since her return from Singapore, Diana's eyes had seemed like that.

The strange fancy seized McCloskey to touch Diana. He put out his hand to touch her thigh. He did not see her move, but when his hand came to rest, it was touching the chair. He rose to get himself another drink. As he passed behind Diana's chair, he put out his hand to touch her

shoulder. Her back was turned, so she could not have seen the movement, but at the precise moment when his hand should have touched her shoulder, she leaned forward to strike a heavy chord. The strong impulse came to him to force the issue, but he refrained, remembering in time that he was a doctor, and that the consequences of such a careless act were incalculable.

When he returned with his drink, McCloskey moved his chair out of temptation.

"You've had enough, Mac," said Diana, giving herself a rest and seizing his whiskey-and-soda. "I've earned this."

The dancers shuffled off the floor to their seats and the lounge hummed with their talk. One of the young officials came across to ask Diana to give him the next dance. His hand, too, sought her shoulder, but found only the chair. When the young man had gone away disconsolately, Diana, who knew that McCloskey had been watching the trifling incident closely, turned to him and, looking him squarely in the eyes, said: "How did you know, Mac?"

"I didn't know. I guessed—and wondered."

"Is it bad, Mac?"

"I think it is, Diana. You must break it yourself. You like John Hudd, don't you?"

"Yes, Mac, very much."

"Then there he is. Go across to him now. The boy's eating his heart out for love of you. Put your arm through his, ask him to get you a drink, dance with him, anything. It's serious, Diana, damned serious. Touching and being touched is a part of life, an important part. If you want to go on living, you've got to get over this nonsense."

"I know, Mac. I'll try."

Rising to her feet, Diana forced a smile. Then, walking across to where John Hudd stood expectantly, she stopped dead in her tracks. When she was some three feet distant from him, her muscles refused to function. During the seconds she stood, fighting to make her muscles obey her, Diana became conspicuous. Many eyes were turned upon her. She returned the way she had gone. McCloskey caught

a brief glimpse of her face and her wide, staring eyes, as she ran past the piano and out into the night.

"What is wrong with that girl, Mac?" asked Maggie Kennedy, coming to the piano, where McCloskey was preparing to resume playing. "Why does she dislike me so?" she continued, without waiting for a reply.

"Why do you dislike her so? That's just as pertinent a question."

"Do I, I wonder? Perhaps I do, Mac. I'd never thought of it quite like that. If I do—and I don't admit it—can you think why?"

"There's only room for one queen bee in a hive, Maggie. I don't know enough about bees to say whether, if there were two, they would hate each other. But I do know that they would fight to the death."

X

THREE months had passed since the death of Jules Duvivier, the longest three months of Diana's life. Ninety long days, almost without emotion of any kind except a grief which, in process of losing its fierce edge, had become a dull ache. Somehow, when the grief had been at its fiercest, life had been easier to bear, because coherent thought had been impossible. Now having demonstrated that life without Jules was, after all, possible—the proof of it was that she had survived three months—there were moments when Diana had the strange fancy that the fact of survival was in itself disloyal, proof that her love had not been the splendid and all-absorbing thing she had believed it to be. It was foolish, muddled thinking, but none the less real for that.

Diana had awakened in the morning, hoping that the day would dawn in more than ordinary splendour, for it was a day dedicated to Jules. The early morning exceeded her expectations, and even when the shadows began to shorten,

it was cool and pleasant. A light breeze had painted white horses upon an indigo sea which, as it approached the land, turned to purest turquoise blue, flecked with the cream of surf.

An hour after dawn Diana rode out along the coast road to a little bay where clean golden sand lay like a carpet under haphazard coconut palms, leaning to the prevailing wind. She loved the spot. Nobody else came there and only the scuttling land crabs disturbed the solitude.

Hobbling her horse where there was shade and meagre pasture, Diana undressed, plunging naked through the creaming surf towards the clear depths which lay beyond. Refreshed and cleansed by the limpid water, she lay on the sand for a while deep in thought. In the pocket of her jodhpur riding breeches reposed Jules's letter, still unopened, to the reading of which the day was dedicated.

Before opening it, Diana re-read a heartbroken letter which had come from Jules's father. A part of it she almost knew by heart. "Since Jules loved you," wrote Duvivier *père*, "and wanted to make you my daughter, I regard you as my daughter. For many years I have tried to persuade Jules to marry, but he would always reply to me 'I have not found her yet, Papa, but when I find her I shall know.' Jules was a strange young man, but he possessed a certain wisdom and, although you and I are strangers, I trust in his wisdom and believe that you are the kind of daughter I would have loved. . . . Come to Paris and bring a little joy into an old man's life. . . ."

Diana had written in reply to this that, on returning to Europe, she would go immediately to see him, but that in the meanwhile she required time so that her affairs might, in the Gallic phrase, arrange themselves.

Now, her fingers trembling with excitement, Diana extracted Jules's letter from her pocket. The envelope was stained and crumpled with many handlings. This, the last tangible link with Jules, might mean so much. If Jules had possessed the clarity of vision which enabled him to sense the imminence of his own death, perhaps, she permitted herself to hope, that same clarity had enabled him to see

something of the problems which his passing had created. There was nowhere else to turn. So, on this gay, sparkling day, the kind meant for life, love and laughter, Diana turned back the pages of her life and sought to draw comfort from the dead.

Jules wrote in French. Diana was thankful for that, for while his English was fluent enough, it was frequently stilted. A Frenchman seldom blends well into the pattern of an alien landscape and seldom speaks an alien tongue with the love and understanding he gives to his own.

So intent was Diana upon the pages of Jules's letter that for the next many minutes the light of the sun, the music of the surf and the breeze rattling the dead palm fronds were shut out from her consciousness.

Diane: I am nearly pure Celt and we Celts have strange fancies. My fondest wish is that my fancies will prove to be just fancies and that you will never read this letter, because if you ever read this it will be because I have gone, never to return.

It is a discipline as I write these words not to look at you, sitting like a statue of warm ivory upon the bed, while the sunlight reflected from the water all round us flickers across your firm young breasts and upon your face which is sad and thoughtful. I am impelled to throw the pen and ink into the lake, to take into my arms again your lovely body which holds no secrets from me. I feel as I used to feel when a small boy, compelled to write punishments after school was over, while outside the schoolroom were so many entrancing things to do and see. Me, I am not clever with a pen.

No man has ever been as happy as I am, Diane. I did not believe there was so much happiness as we have crowded into our short life together. You, too, have been happy. I know this because the looks I have seen on your face are the kind which can never be counterfeited. We are both a little mad, reckless and, I believe, a little fearful that joy such as ours cannot last long. This feeling is

strong in me and, I suspect, in you also. If I am right—if this letter is my farewell to you—how right we have been! What fools we should have been to burn our lamps slowly to save the oil! What fools we should have been to devote to any other single purpose the hours we have spent in each other's arms! Between us the white heat of passion has never cooled. We have never come down from the sweet madness of the mountain tops to the prosaic sanity of the valleys. We took the tide at the flood and let it carry us where it would.

For this and much more, Diane, let us be thankful. Is it not wonderful, Diane, that I have never seen anger flashing from your eyes, because I came home smelling of another woman's perfume; that I shall never see those firm young breasts sag with the weight of years, or harsh lines gather round your mouth; that we shall never quarrel because you spend too much upon the housekeeping, or because you put vinegar instead of lemon juice in the sauce tartare; that you will never see me become a disgusting old man dribbling in his beard; and that time can never tarnish one single memory we have of each other?

This is a letter written to make you happy, Diane, not to make you sad. When you have read it you will know that ours has been a good philosophy for, as a god and goddess together on the lake, we never descended to the ennui of mortals. It is a fine thought, Diane. Hold it and cherish it and then, when you are tempted to shed a tear for Jules, who has gone where there are no tears, you will smile happily for the memories of the sweet and foolish things we whispered aboard this small ship.

We have often spoken of jealousy, Diane. It is because of my changed ideas on jealousy that I am aware that Destiny has plans for me. Jealousy is petty, ignoble, while I, Jules, am feeling a little noble. Love would mean nothing if I wanted you to be unhappy when I am gone. I think of you, Diane, as a lovely rose garden which I have cultivated. It is demanded of me that I go on a journey when the roses are perfect. Am I so ignoble that

I want no other eye but mine to be filled with their perfection, no other nostrils but mine to twitch with the ecstasy of their sweetness? No, Diane, no. Let it be a condition of your reading this letter that our debts—mine to you and yours to me—are paid. This is your receipt. You will have shed a few tears, *bien entendu*. I find no fault with that, for tears are the protocol of grief and you will have grieved.

But now, Diane, you are free, free as the birds.

Jules, he belongs to the past, but no part of the future belongs to him. There will be no lack of suitors for your hand, Diane. Be sure of that. Choose one of them, but choose with care and without thought of Jules, for where Jules is going no man is *coeu*.

I am nearly at the end of this wearisome letter, Diane. Patience! Last of all, it is a condition of reading this letter that you destroy it. Keep it a few hours, or a few days, if you will, but no longer. I do not want that it shall be put away in a small box (along with the orchid which I pinned in your hair and which I saw you press in a book) to be brought out every time you are in the mood for a little sweet melancholy, for in the short splendid life Diane and Jules lived together, there was no melancholy, only love and laughter.

Adieu, beloved. I throw down the pen for I have better things to do and I cannot wait to be in your arms.

JULES

The shadows were beginning to lengthen by the time Diana had read the letter for the last uncounted time. Then, striking a match, she held the flame to the corners of the sheets. A puzzled smile hovered about her lips while she watched the charred pieces of paper eddy round her and float up into nothingness.

Diana rode back along the coast road deep in thought. There had been about Jules's letter a finality that was chilling, emphasising the finality of death itself. Only a Frenchman, with the realism of his race, could have written that

letter, Diana decided. It left no doubt of the writer's love for her, just as it left no doubt that she herself must plan the future alone. Not only must Jules be left out of all plans, but they must be made even as though Jules himself had never existed. She and Jules had walked laughing along a gay highway. Suddenly, they had come to a point where the ways forked. It was as though here, as he doffed his hat, Jules had said: "Well, my dear, it was wonderful while it lasted. However, here I take the left fork, while you go on. It will be a pleasant memory, I hope, for both of us, but nothing we may have said or done by the way must be permitted to influence the course of the future. Goodbye, my dear."

It was just as simple as that. And now, the future had to be faced without the vestige of an excuse for any self-deception. Jules had written his letter to be kind but, Diana wondered, might it not have been kinder to have blunted the edge of death's finality? Time would answer that question. Was the fool's paradise the absurdity which men professed to believe?

Diana glanced at her watch. The lonely future had begun. There was a dinner party at the Residency that evening, to which she and her brother, in common with the rest of the community, had been invited. Mounting her horse, she began to canter down the coast road in the direction of the Fort.

At a point where the road narrowed Diana was compelled to walk her horse because of a horseman ahead, who sat slumped in the saddle and appeared to be in no hurry. She waited impatiently until there was room to pass, turning as she did so to look into the face of a bearded European she had never seen before. He looked more like an ape than a man, for his face was almost hidden in a mass of hair, which had been allowed to grow unchecked and untended.

Managing to get past with a few inches to spare Diana gave her mount a flick of the whip, breaking into a smart canter again. From the rear came a shout: "Hey, there! What's your hurry?" It was a few seconds before Diana

realised that the voice was that of Adrian Hornby and that he was in hot pursuit.

In five minutes Diana turned round to see whether she was still being followed, finding to her relief that there was nobody in sight. Slackening her speed, she rode on following the contour of the coast round a small promontory. It was not until on the far side of the promontory, with Fort Mallet barely two miles distant, Diana saw too late that her pursuer had taken the shorter inland route and was waiting two hundred yards or so ahead. To return the way she had come would be folly, for sunset was approaching and she had no fancy to play hide-and-seek among the coconut groves in darkness. The only sensible course was the bold one. Diana rode on with apparent unconcern in the direction of the horse and rider silhouetted against the evening sky, completely blocking the narrow track. "Please allow me to pass," she said quietly.

"I suppose you don't recognise me. Is that it?"

"I recognise your voice, Adrian."

"My own mother wouldn't recognise anything else about me!" was the bitter retort. "So you want to pass, eh? Well, my fine lady, you'll pass when I'm ready to let you pass and not before. I've been wanting a chat with you for a long time."

Diana shivered with disgust. The deterioration in Hornby was almost past belief. He not only looked ghastly, but he stank of stale sweat and liquor. "Why not, Adrian?" she replied in normal tones, putting him off his guard. A second later she struck his horse on the rump with her riding whip, using all her strength. The startled beast plunged into the dense scrub at the side of the track, unseating his rider. Thankful at her escape, Diana put the whip to her own mount and did not draw rein until she reached the safety of the Fort.

Jack had to be told. Diana told him in the few minutes before dressing for the dinner at the Residency. He was with difficulty restrained from being a policeman about the whole matter, ventilating it all in public. "The man's stark raving mad," Jack Maynard said angrily. "He's become a menace."

Disgusted and horrified as she had been by the encounter, Diana could still find it in her heart to be sorry for Adrian Hornby, for she sensed something of the man's struggle with himself and the bitterness of his self-pity. She said as much to her brother, who replied: "You realise, don't you Di, that I shall have to make a report about it?"

"I implore you not to, Jack. For the rest of the time we are here I'll take care to keep out of his way. . . ."

"You don't seem to realise, Di," said Jack stiffly, "that my job, my whole future, is at stake."

After that there was nothing to say. Diana went into her own room and began to dress. Life was bitter and lonely enough already, but if she and Jack became estranged, it would come intolerable. She resigned herself to becoming once again the target of public interest when her encounter with Hornby became generally known. Suddenly, it crossed her mind, she didn't care. What did it matter? What did anything matter? Everything sweet in life lay buried in a grave overlooking Toba. "Jules, Jules!" she sobbed. "I'll try to live without you, because you wanted me to try, but it isn't worth the struggle."

XI

THERE was an air of tension in and about the Residency. The rambling house was heavy with the unspoken thoughts of those who dwelled in it. Two guests were living there and would remain until the next boat took them on their way. In remote places like Fort Mallet, where no proper hotel accommodation existed, the burden of entertaining guests with any pretensions to importance fell automatically upon the Resident, or other senior official.

One of the guests, a Mr Halkett, was important for the reason that the business interests which he represented in London were contemplating investing large capital in the

hinterland which was governed from Fort Mallet. He was an awkward and demanding guest who seemed to believe that the weight of money he commanded absolved him from the ordinary courtesies of life. The other guest, a Mr Cave-Brown, had better manners than Halkett, but his presence was largely responsible for the leaden atmosphere and tension which prevailed. Mr Cave-Brown was 'something at the Colonial Office,' holding one of those vague positions which eluded precise definition but which, none the less, carried considerable power and influence.

The mail boat which brought Cave-Brown brought a private letter to Hugh Kennedy from a friend in the Administration in Singapore to the effect that much might depend in the future upon the nature of the report which Cave-Brown would undoubtedly make after his visit to Fort Mallet.

Hugh Kennedy wished he had not known these things. He was too much the official to slight the man, but too much a man to seek the other's good graces by any special deference. The situation put them both in a difficult position.

Cave-Brown, by virtue of his official position, was the guest of honour. At dinner, therefore, he sat on Maggie Kennedy's right, while on her left was Halkett. Diana was seated two places down the table from Cave-Brown, diagonally opposite Halkett. Since men outnumbered women, normal table seating was impossible. On her right, to Diana's relief, sat Angus McCloskey, while facing her was John Hudd, whom she had not seen for several weeks.

Diana was looking her best. She was wearing a gown of smoke-blue chiffon, low and square-cut at the neck. Her skin had not lost the dark tan it had acquired on T'oba and against it the double strand of rose-pink pearls looked superb. Glancing at herself in a long mirror before entering the dining-room, Diana decided that Jules would have been proud of her.

Maggie Kennedy, seated at the end of the table, wore a

distraught air. She seemed harassed and old, ill at ease. In her conversations with the guests of honour there were awkward gaps. Almost for the first time since she had known Maggie Kennedy, Diana found it possible to forget how much she disliked her. Halkett was relating a story of some huge deal he had tried to put over in West Africa, attributing his failure to the "blind ignorance of colonial officials". Maggie seemed to be on the point of reminding him that he was staying under the roof of a colonial official, when Halkett, who loved his own voice, began to elaborate upon his own ideas of Utopia. This, his hearers were given to understand, was a world ruled by businessmen for the benefit of their kind. It was not so much what the man said as the way he said it which struck the harsh note. Maggie Kennedy winced visibly, while Cave-Brown took refuge behind a far-away look.

"Tell me, Mrs Kennedy," said Halkett, who was beginning to realise how coolly his views were being received, "who is that beautiful young woman wearing those magnificent pearls?"

"Her name is Maynard—Miss Maynard," replied Maggie. "She is the sister of the Assistant Superintendent of Police, that nice young man my husband is talking to now."

Halkett did not even glance down towards the Resident. He had eyes only for the pearls. "I've never seen a more perfectly matched necklace of rose-pink pearls in my life," he said in an awed voice. "They're worth a fortune."

"I think you must be mistaken, Mr Halkett," said Maggie, whose curiosity had been aroused. "Probably the beauty of the wearer has enhanced the beauty of the pearls."

"I don't make mistakes like that, Mrs Kennedy," he replied with the air of a man entirely sure of himself. "I've never been nearer to those pearls than I am this minute, but from this seat without moving, I'll make a firm bid of \$60,000 Straits—and make a nice piece of change on the resale. I'm an expert, Mrs Kennedy. It's my hobby, and a very paying one, too."

Cave-Brown pricked up his ears and began to take an interest in the party. Locked in his despatch case was a long report in which the name of Miss Diana Maynard figured largely. In his experience of Assistant Superintendents of Police, they did not have sisters who wore \$60,000 pearl necklaces.

"Nevertheless, Mr Halkett," said Maggie, unconvinced, "I think you must be mistaken." Unless she misjudged Halkett sadly, he was the kind of man who would pursue the matter to its conclusion, without allowing any false sense of delicacy to deter him. It would be interesting to get to the bottom of it. "Diana," she said in honeyed tones, "Mr Halkett here is admiring your pearls. He thinks they are quite fabulously valuable."

"Then I am afraid he will be disappointed to learn that they aren't," replied Diana, dismissing the subject and turning to McCloskey.

"There are plenty of witnesses to hear me," said Halkett loudly, "and as I just told our hostess here, I'm prepared to give \$60,000 for them—without any further examination. What do you think of that, Miss Maynard?"

"I think," replied Diana coolly, "that if you don't mind, I would rather not discuss them any more. They were a gift. I don't sell gifts."

"But you don't deny their value, I notice."

"I don't feel called upon to deny, or admit, their value, Mr Halkett," retorted Diana haughtily. "I would prefer not to discuss them any more."

Across the table Diana caught John Hudd's eye and smiled at him. John was mutely pleading with her for permission to tell Halkett the truth, or what John himself believed to be the truth. Until that moment Diana had forgotten the string of cultured pearls John had given her, forgotten, too, the chance resemblance of the pearls she was wearing to those which lay at the bottom of Toba. The extent of the resemblance did not go beyond the fact that both necklaces contained approximately the same number of pearls and were strung in roughly the same

manner. The resemblance was on a par with that between a cow and a horse: they both had four legs.

The chief reason why Diana had made no flat contradiction of Halkett was her dislike of telling a direct lie. The man's ill-manners, she decided, had put him outside the pale of courtesy, so she had not hesitated to snub him.

Halkett had swallowed his snub with difficulty and was again proclaiming his certainty.

"Shall I tell him, Di?" asked John eagerly.

"Yes, John, tell him," Diana replied. She had no objection to anyone knowing the truth—as John believed he knew it.

Waiting for a lull in the conversation, John remarked loudly: "I think you're a very lucky man, Mr Halkett."

"Lucky? Who, me? Why lucky? Luck doesn't get you very far in this world. Judgment and hard work are what you need. Why am I lucky?"

"Because Miss Maynard didn't accept your offer of \$60,000. I think you're very lucky indeed."

"Don't you believe it, young fellow. The offer is still open. What do you know about pearls anyway?"

"Nothing at all, Mr Halkett. I don't know a pearl from a glass bead," replied John who, in face of the other's off-hand courtesy, was prepared to spare him nothing.

Conversation had come to an end down the entire length of the table. Every face was turned towards Maggie's end, where the little drama was unfolding itself.

"Then," said Halkett with insulting deliberation, "if you know nothing about pearls, why offer opinions about them? I do know and that's the difference between us."

If Maggie Kennedy had done her duty as hostess—which in justice to her was her habit—she would have stopped the discussion. The prospect of Diana's public humiliation had blinded her to the fact that her negligence—in the presence of Cave-Brown, who would be sure to note it—was not helping her husband, who was goggle-eyed with horror and amazement.

"I'm not offering opinions, Mr Halkett," continued John mildly. "I'm about to state a fact. You see"—he paused for

effect—"I'm the only person at this table who knows—knows, Mr Halkett, the value of those pearls."

"Then, if you know so much, tell us...."

"I have Miss Maynard's permission to tell you that I paid about twenty or twenty-one dollars for them. They're Japanese cultured pearls."

Veins stood out on Halkett's temples. His jaw muscles could be seen swelling as his emotion rose and he fumbled for words. Down the table John's statement was greeted at first in dead silence, while those present were digesting the delicious fact that a pseudo-connoisseur had been exposed. Halkett had not endeared himself to anyone in Fort Mallet.

It began with a titter and ended with a great gust of laughter far beyond the limits permitted by courtesy. People pushed back their chairs in order to give free rein to their mirth. There were only four at the table who did not laugh. Of these, Halkett was first. He sat frozen with rage. Once he put his hands over his ears to shut out the hateful sound. At their respective ends of the table, Hugh and Maggie Kennedy looked at each other and at their guests as though they could not believe the evidence of eyes and ears. Even Cave-Brown was laughing, but with the air of a man enjoying some quite private jest. His eyes were upcast to the *punkah* which swung over his head as he gave vent to his thin-lipped, soundless mirth. The laughter began to die when those at the table had their attention drawn to Diana who, serene and aloof from it all, was eating her portion of cheese soufflé with an enjoyment and concentration that was almost chilling. A smile hovered over her lips, for she was thinking how Jules would have enjoyed the jest.

When the laughter had died away to nothing and several of the guests were unashamedly wiping their eyes with their napkins, Maggie's voice, harsh and grating, stabbed the silence. "When you were in London, Mr Cave-Brown," she asked, "did you see any of the new shows?"

The banality of the remark caused a fresh outburst of titters, which a glare from Maggie suppressed.

"One wonders," observed Hugh Kennedy, in a well-intentioned effort to restore order, "whether pearls and precious stones will keep their value for long. Really, the modern imitations are so good. When an expert like Mr Halkett can be deceived, it . . ."

"Mr Halkett hasn't been deceived," said that worthy truculently.

"I really think," interposed Maggie, "that we should find some other topic of conversation."

"Dr McCloskey," announced Diana, "has an *orang-utan* that he's teaching to talk. Haven't you, Mac?"

"The appalling Jimmie!" said Maggie, looking almost gratefully at Diana. "Do you know, Mr Halkett, that Dr McCloskey had taught Jimmie to perform card tricks."

"I'll believe almost anything, Mrs Kennedy—after tonight," replied Halkett pointedly. "I suppose," he added, turning to McCloskey, "your Jimmie isn't by any chance a pearl expert."

"No, Mr Halkett, not yet," said the doctor, who had had plenty to drink, "but I *have* been able to teach him decent manners."

There was nothing left for Maggie to do, but bring the meal to a hasty close and retire to the drawing-room with the rest of the women.

"I'm afraid, Mr Halkett," said the Resident, when coffee and cigars were going the rounds, "that our laughter at your expense was neither kind nor polite. At base, I think, we all resent it when we find someone with more knowledge than we have. That's why we are so pleased on the rare occasions when we can confound the expert. Most of us are so appallingly ignorant."

"What you people won't realise," said Halkett, with a courage worthy of a better cause, "is that in this particular instance the expert—that's me—isn't wrong. My offer of \$60,000 still holds good. In fact, if I have to, I'm prepared to go a bit higher. I dare say," he went on, "that I've been tactless enough to stir up something that's got nothing to do with pearls. If I have. I'm sorry...."

"Mr Halkett," said Jack Maynard, his eyes blazing with indignation, "I would be obliged to you if you will stop talking about my sister, or her pearls. It isn't funny any longer."

"Yes, I really think Maynard is right," agreed the Resident. "The whole episode must have been very embarrassing for her."

"And yet," observed Halkett, "my impression was that of all the people at the table, she was the least embarrassed. I found it most embarrassing, being taken for a fool."

"I wonder," said Jack Maynard in a stage whisper, "how he'd like a punch on the nose."

Everybody hoped that this was the end of the matter. The episode had already gone too far. Unfortunately, the persistence which had enabled Halkett to amass a considerable fortune would not permit him to relinquish a stand once taken.

When the men had joined the ladies on the terrace overlooking the sea, Halkett returned to the attack.

"Young lady," he said to Diana, "the offer of \$60,000 is still open."

Without replying, Diana looked him up and down from the top of his balding head to his patent-leather toes, and turned away.

Maggie Kennedy, who witnessed this, was a prey to bitter thoughts. The unprecedented scene at the dinner table must inevitably suggest to Cave-Brown, when he came to write his report, that a Resident unable to control his guests, and who permitted such a scene to take place, was deficient in those qualities demanded in an administrator and senior officer of the Crown. Hugh, she believed, would not survive officially. No amount of explanation now would serve any purpose. The long years of faithful service would be forgotten and in a little while Hugh Kennedy would be relegated to the discard, thrown on the scrapheap of empire as a weak vessel, no longer a worthy recipient of authority. They would give him his pension and for a little while men would talk of 'poor old Hugh Kennedy' before they forgot

him. The splendid days were almost over. The vista ahead was one of genteel poverty and obscurity, killing time at the card table in some frowsy *pension* in Tunbridge Wells, or Menton, in the company of people who lived in the past—because there was no future, clinging to pitiful pieces of Benares brassware, Chinese embroidery, sporting trophies and the memories of the years of endeavour which were gone for ever. The anguish of the prospect evoked by these thoughts tore at Maggie Kennedy's vitals, so that she ceased for a little while to be anything but a confused jumble of fear and hatred. She looked across the terrace at Diana, slender, graceful, poised and, seemingly, unmoved, seeing in her the author of all her misfortune. This was the girl to whom she had offered friendship, to whom she would, in return for a measure of surrender, have given wise counsel and shelter. Nothing had ever been quite the same at Fort Mallet since this girl's coming. She remained cool and indifferent while storms raged around her, smiling as though she found something amusing in the weakness of others, triumphant at her own power for evil. The ghastly scene at the dinner table would never have been enacted had it not been for Diana Maynard, who had gone on eating delicately as though she had nothing to do with it. In a few years—Maggie's imagination began to run away with her—when the enforced idleness of retirement had killed Hugh Kennedy, it would be because this graceless trollop had sold her favours to a young Frenchman for a string of pearls. Others were going to pay for her looseness, while she, posing as an innocent, looked disdainfully at her victims.

That she was being unjust and foolish did not occur to Maggie. Hatred and resentment, fear and bitterness, had robbed her of the power to see things in perspective, and had made her utterly reckless.

Halkett, boiling with indignation, seemed at last to have given up the task of proving that his judgment was not at fault. He glowered alone at the far end of the terrace. Deliberately, Maggie sought him out. "You know, Mr

Halkett," she said softly, "you don't give me the impression of being a man who makes many mistakes."

"I make my share of them, Mrs Kennedy, but I wasn't making one tonight, if that's what you mean."

"It seems to me," she went on, "that things went either much too far or not far enough, if you understand what I mean."

"I quite agree with you. Frankly, I don't relish being taken for a fool."

"No, I'm sure you don't," agreed Maggie soothingly. "I'm quite satisfied, you know, that both Diana Maynard and Mr Hudd believe that they are speaking the truth."

"The girl hasn't said anything," snapped Halkett. "The young fellow, I'm sure, *thinks* he's speaking the truth."

"Isn't it just possible, Mr Halkett, that there has been some mistake and that he was sold that necklace for twenty dollars, as he says?"

"Anything's possible, Mrs Kennedy, but there's a degree of improbability about some things which justifies one in calling them impossible."

"All doubts can be set at rest quite easily, Mr Halkett. Only a few hundred yards away there is a Chinese merchant who has been buying pearls for more than forty years . . ."

"You mean Chow-li? That's an idea! Chow-li is a man whose judgment I would accept before my own. . . ."

"Then leave it to me, Mr Halkett. We'll arrange for Chow-li to give us his opinion. Not a word to anyone, Mr Halkett."

Maggie found Jack Maynard sitting alone on the balustrade of the terrace, gazing out into the night. He was profoundly shocked by the turn which events had taken and disinclined to mix with the other guests. "There you are, Jack, dear boy," Maggie began. "I want you to know how badly I feel about everything this evening. It must have been terribly embarrassing for you and poor Diana."

"It *was* pretty bad, Maggie, thank you. I simply had to shut that fellow up. I thought Di behaved wonderfully, didn't you?"

"She was grand, Jack, simply grand. You must be very proud of her."

"I am, Maggie."

It occurred to Jack Maynard once more to wish that Diana could realise what a good friend Maggie Kennedy was. It seemed to be Diana's one blind spot.

"You know, Jack," said Maggie persuasively, sensing that the young man was already putty in her hands, "I don't think that things can be left as they are."

"I don't follow, Maggie."

"Well, forgive me if I speak plainly, Jack, but can't you see that that man Halkett has sowed doubt in a lot of minds this evening. Some people believe him and they are asking themselves how a girl like Diana got hold of a valuable necklace like that. You see, Jack, people aren't all as kind and charitable as you are . . . and, well, for Diana's sake, I feel that all doubts have got to be set at rest. I'm older and wiser in the ways of the world than you are, Jack. Don't you see that Diana's—reputation is at stake? Nobody cares about that ill-bred Mr Halkett making himself ridiculous, but people *are*, right at this moment, thinking and whispering things about Diana. You don't need to be told that dear Diana's reputation is very precious . . . and it's in your hands, Jack. You're her brother and it's your duty—your duty, Jack—to defend it."

"Yes, I see that, Maggie, but how? I'm beginning to see what you mean, but surely people can't be so beastly as to believe . . ."

"People are pretty beastly sometimes, Jack."

"But what can I do?" asked Jack Maynard, horror-struck at all the implications.

"There's only one thing to be done, Jack, and you must do it—now. This loud-mouthed Halkett person has to be put in his place and the man to do it is Chow-li. He's an acknowledged expert on pearls and his judgment will be accepted by everyone without question. Go off quietly, Jack, and bring him back. Ask him, as a special favour to me, to come."

Maggie Kennedy stood exultingly for a minute as Jack Maynard, full of gratitude, disappeared in the shadows on his errand. Then, mingling with her guests, her face showing nothing of the storm which raged within, she awaited the moment of triumph. Already, she began to rehearse her own shocked amazement when Chow-li would declare that the pearls were immensely valuable and that Diana, by implication, was not the innocent young thing she appeared to be.

The exposure, Maggie mused, would kill two birds with one stone, for it would open John Hudd's eyes to the deception practised on him. He would never forgive it and he would, after this evening, be free of the infatuation which enslaved him and was making him ill with overwork in a vain effort to forget Diana.

XII

ANGUS McCLOSKEY put a pillow on the stone seat for Diana and, finding another for himself, sat down beside her. The hum of voices from the other end of the terrace came faintly to them. "You can't complain th^t: *that* was a dull party, can you?" he asked amusedly.

"Maybe you found it funny, Mac. I didn't. How did it get so out of hand? That's what I don't understand. It was as though a poltergeist had taken charge and was throwing the crockery about . . . and that horrible man Halkett."

"If you'd been smart, Diana, you'd have taken him up on his offer. Nobody's going to offer you \$60,000 again. Now we're talking about it, why didn't you accept? I'm sure John Hudd wouldn't have minded. . . ."

"If the pearls were really imitation, or cultured, it would have been dishonest to take the man's money, wouldn't it?"

"Agreed," said McCloskey, looking oddly at Diana. "But what if they were real?"

"If they were real, Mac, then perhaps \$60,000 wasn't enough, and real or false, it was none of that odious man's affair. The only person who seemed to enjoy herself was Mrs Kennedy. She . . . she fairly gloated."

"I wonder why she should enjoy herself, Diana, when she must have known that in all probability this evening's brawl will cost her husband his job. Yet, I'm inclined to agree with you: she did seem to enjoy it all."

"But, Mac," said Diana in a distressed voice, "how could it possibly affect poor Mr Kennedy's job?"

"Because, when that snooping fellow Cave-Brown writes his report, important men are going to jump to the conclusion that Hugh Kennedy isn't the man he was and that he needs a good long rest. Maggie knows that, as well as I do. That's what makes her behaviour so amazing. You once told me that Maggie hated you, Diana. I laughed at you at the time, because the idea was absurd. But you were right. Why, why? What have you done to her, Diana?"

"Nothing, Mac. Nothing, that is, except refuse to be patronised by her and to keep my private affairs to myself. That might account for dislike, but what she feels for me is more than that and there isn't any reason for it, Mac, or none that I know."

"That's better. None that you know. Have you ever stopped to think, Diana, why more people like dogs than like cats?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"A lot," replied McCloskey. "People like dogs because they are friendly, spontaneous, emotional, and they profess to dislike cats because cats are well-poised and sly. But neither of these reasons is the truth in fact: people like dogs because they are dependent, because they make some human beings feel that they are necessary. Maggie Kennedy has to feel necessary: you, by your independence, destroy that feeling in her."

"That sounds very clever, Mac, but it isn't a good enough reason for hatred."

"Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that, Diana," said the doctor soberly. "One can only guess at the frightening, evil things that go on inside a jealous and frustrated woman—or man for that matter. I wish"—he paused as though doubtful whether he should continue—"I wish you would take the first boat away from here. It would be better for you, better for Fort Mallet . . . better for me, too."

"I thought we were friends, Mac," said Diana looking up sharply. "I wish you hadn't said that."

"You may regard me as a friend, Diana. That's what hurts. You see . . . I love you. I have almost from the moment I met you. It's all right . . . don't be alarmed, because I'm in perfect control of myself—now. Fortunately, for me anyhow, I realise the absurdity of it and"—he gave her a friendly grin—"have taken steps to deal with it. But it's because I love you, Diana, I feel free to talk to you as nobody else dare talk."

"I'm sorry, Mac, more sorry than I can tell you. . . ."

"I never intended to tell you, but now the cat's out of the bag. Forget what I've said, for I'll never say it again. I said it, hoping that it would impress you with the force of my sincerity. Go, Diana, get to hell out of here as soon as you decently can. . . . There are things that can't be put into words, but I know I'm right."

"Mac," said Diana in a small, frightened voice, "what's wrong with me? You know what I mean, so don't hedge."

"I don't know, Diana. There's something elemental about you that defies definition. I've felt it often. Jimmie has felt it. You're favoured by the gods, singled out for unknowable things. You have beauty, brains, the subtle aura of something intangible which saps men's reason and brings out the worst in women. You have everything that every woman prays for. Power, great wealth and public acclaim are yours . . . if you want them. But, for gifts like these, never forget it, the gods exact payment."

"I'm paying, Mac. God, what a price I'm paying!"

The buzz of conversation at the other end of the terrace became intensified and high above it Maggie Kennedy's voice could be heard calling: "Does anyone know where Miss Maynard is?"

"I wonder what Maggie wants you for," said McCloskey.

"Nothing good," replied Diana bitterly, "you may be sure of that. Let's find out and get it over."

The first thing Diana saw on joining the rest of the guests was Hugh Kennedy's horror-stricken face. He was looking at his wife as though he could not believe the evidence of his eyes and ears. Then, standing to one side, smiling, courteous and completely at ease, she saw Chow-li.

On Maggie Kennedy's face, written plainly for all to see, was a mixture of malice and triumph. Halkett, sweating with emotion and excitement, stood close behind her. Maggie Kennedy led the way into the drawing-room, while the guests, scenting drama, followed her closely. Diana, except for the Resident, who was mumbling inaudibly, was the last to enter the room. Everyone except Cave-Brown looked tense and excited, while he seemed merely amused.

"Diana, my dear," began Maggie Kennedy, "I feel that you have been subjected to terrible embarrassment this evening and, thinking it only fair to you, I have asked Mr Chow-li to set at rest all doubts about your pearls. I hope you approve, my dear."

"It seems a little late to ask me that, Mrs Kennedy," came the cool reply, "and you may take my word for it that I haven't been a bit embarrassed—even if you have."

Jack Maynard looked at his sister incredulously. He burned to tell her not to be so ungracious in the face of what Maggie was doing for her sake. Some of his thoughts revealed themselves on his face causing Diana to remark: "What's the matter, Jack? You look shocked—as though someone was laughing in church!"

A ripple of uneasy laughter went round the room.

Maggie Kennedy bit her lip with annoyance. She liked people to be abashed, while Diana, standing proudly erect, her chin tilted pugnaciously, was anything but that. "It's very sweet of you to say that you haven't been embarrassed, Diana," continued Maggie. "But this unfortunate discussion took place under my—our roof and we feel responsible, don't we, Hugh? It's a shame that there should have been all this upset because of John's little gift to you, but you do see that if people were to believe that your pearls were real and worth a fortune it would—well, it would look rather peculiar. You must see that, my dear."

"Anything can be twisted to look peculiar, Mrs Kennedy," said Diana. "Twisted minds can twist anything . . . but anyway, what do you want of me?"

"I'd be so grateful, my dear, if you would take off your pearls and allow Mr Chow-li to examine them. Mr Halkett says they are worth a fortune and you say . . . "

"I have said nothing about them, Mrs Kennedy." Diana's voice, clear as crystal, devoid of any emotion, seemed as passionless as that of a judge. "Mr Halkett is entitled to his opinions, just as I am entitled—to ignore them."

"Do you mean, my dear, that you refuse to let Mr Chow-li, examine your pearls?" The older woman's voice grated harshly. She was very near losing control of herself in her anxiety to humiliate Diana. There had been a subtle change of front among the guests, too. Maggie felt this. Sympathy in the room was veering towards Diana.

"Of course I don't refuse, Mrs Kennedy," replied Diana, "but I don't have to like being treated in this way while I am a guest in your house."

A gasp of amazement went round the room. Nobody had ever routed Maggie in the memory of anyone present, because nobody had ever dared. Looking at Diana, they saw someone who was utterly unafraid, cool and contemptuous, sure of herself. More than one of them wished he possessed the same courage and forthrightness. Maggie Kennedy's stature began to shrink at an alarming rate.

Diana was talking. She had turned her back upon her hostess. "Good evening, Mr Chow-li," she was saying, crossing the circle of lamplight to shake hands with the old Chinese. "I am so sorry that you have been disturbed at this late hour."

"It is nothing, Missie," was the smiling reply. "Something I can do?"

"Please, Mr Chow-li, now that you are here, will you be kind enough to settle an argument. . . ."

Uncomfortably aware that the initiative had been taken from her, Maggie Kennedy retired to the shadows beyond the circle of lamplight. "... You see, Mr Chow-li," continued Diana, unhasping the necklace and dropping the pearls carelessly into his hand, "there is one gentleman here who says that these are worth \$60,000 and another gentleman here who says that they are worth maybe \$20. Which of them is right?"

"What does Missie say?" A glint of amusement and understanding came into the old man's eyes.

"I say nothing, Mr Chow-li. I was taught that to talk about the value of things is not polite."

"I dare say you had more advantages than I had, Miss Maynard," said Halkett. "My parents hadn't much time to teach me good manners."

For the first time that evening Diana liked Halkett.

Meanwhile, Chow-li put the pearls to his lips, glanced briefly at them through a small glass he carried hidden in his black gown, and then, still holding them cupped in his hand, gazed upwards at the ceiling apparently lost in thought.

The tension in the room was building up unbearably when at length the old Chinese ceased his scrutiny of the ceiling and began in turn to scrutinise the faces around him. Halkett was mopping his face anxiously, appearing under the stresss of great emotion. Maggie Kennedy, too, wore a haggard, drawn look. She was peering eagerly into the circle of light. Most of the other faces turned in his direction revealed to the shrewd old Chinese that something strange

was afoot, or these people would not appear so anxious to hear what he had to say. From somewhere at the back of him, Chow-li heard the beginnings of a woman's hysterical laughter. Mrs Gosling was finding events too much for her. Only Diana seemed unconcerned.

Suddenly, Chow-li's face cleared as his perplexities vanished. The pattern of events had been revealed to him. He resumed his study of the pearls. "Very sorry, Missie," he said, handing the necklace back to Diana. "If Missie pay more than ten dolla' Missie pay too much. Very sorry, Missie."

There came from Maggie Kennedy's throat an ugly, gurgling sound. She stepped forward into the circle of lamplight and it seemed to the others present that she was struggling to say something. Hugh Kennedy was just in time to catch her as she fell. At the same moment Diana's eyes locked briefly with Halkett's and before she turned away it seemed as though he gave her a broad wink.

Angus McCloskey came out of the shadows, helping Kennedy to carry the stricken woman to a couch.

Diana chose the moment to slip quietly away. Chow-li, unnoticed now that he had given his verdict, melted into the shadows with Diana. "That man Halkett big thief," he chuckled happily. "My fren' Kum-soo in Padang he offer Mist' Duvivier ninety thousand dolla' but Mist' Duvivier not wanting sell. Any time Missie wanting hundred thousand dolla' Chow-li can give."

XIII

"I just can't understand, Jack, how you could have been so simple as to fall into a trap like that," said Diana, looking at her brother wonderingly across the breakfast table. "What does the Kennedy woman do to you all? Hypnotise you?"

"I'm awfully sorry, Di," said her brother contritely, "but it seemed from the way she put it to me that I was fetching old Chow-li in your interests. After all, Di, you must admit it would have looked a bit odd to people if your pearls had been real. What I mean to say is, where did you get them? That's what people would have asked. Now they know the truth . . . well, it's all right, isn't it? And you know, Di, you really are a bit hard on Maggie."

"Can't you or won't you see, Jack, that your precious Maggie believed that they were real? She believed Chow-li would pronounce them real. . . ."

"No, Di, I won't have it. I just won't believe it. I've known Maggie longer than you have . . . and she just isn't capable of things like that. In most things, Di, you're the hell of a lot smarter than I am, but I've come to the conclusion that where Maggie is concerned you've got . . . well, a kind of blind spot."

Diana sighed and changed the subject. She and Jack were very near a quarrel and if they quarrelled life would become intolerable for both of them. Besides, she was too fond of Jack to allow this to happen. When she could swallow her irritation at his simplicity, there was something about his loyalty to Maggie Kennedy which she found altogether admirable. It was a pity that it was so misplaced.

Five minutes after Jack had gone off to work, there came the sound of heavy, tired feet coming down the gravel path. Diana looked up to see Hugh Kennedy standing at the foot of the verandah steps. He was looking ill and worn, defeated.

"Come and sit down, Mr Kennedy. Let me pour you out

a cup of coffee." The Resident allowed himself to be led to a chair, into which he fell heavily.

"I've come, Diana," he began in a lifeless monotone, "to apologise to you for the indignities you had to suffer under my roof. A guest of mine treated you outrageously . . . and I'm more sorry than I can say. I did not realise it until too late, but I see now that my wife was too ill last evening to know what she was doing. I know that . . . if she recovers, she will want to add her apologies to mine. . . ."

"If she recovers, Mr Kennedy . . . do you mean there is doubt?"

"My wife had a stroke last night after you were all gone. Mac is with her now. He has warned me to be prepared for anything."

"There isn't anything I can say, Mr Kennedy, except that I am terribly sorry. Don't feel badly about last night, either. I wasn't nearly as upset by it as I might have been."

"It's kind of you to take it like that, my dear . . . and now I'll be running along. I'm not . . . very good company, I'm afraid. But I'm glad I've seen you and got it off my chest."

Watching his retreating back, Diana knew that she was looking at a broken man, and her tears would not be repressed. There had been times when his old-fashioned gallantries had been a little wearisome, when his tendency to be pompous had been faintly ridiculous. But now it was easier to remember that he was the soul of honour, unfailingly kind and had devoted a lifetime of endeavour to doing right as he saw right.

Some of Diana's tumultuous thoughts were stilled by the banality of her morning task of giving Jimmie his breakfast. The ape still steadfastly refused to accept food from another hand, whereas from her he took it greedily and ate with relish. He no longer seemed interested in the abacus, or in his clumsy handling of playing cards, but his pleasure at seeing Diana was quite moving.

Usually, when giving Jimmie his morning and evening meals, Diana would recite to him, choosing verses with a

pronounced rhythm, but on this morning she felt a sense of the absurdity of reciting to an ape and neglected to do so. Jimmie pleaded with her, for he seemed to like the music of her voice. But when it became apparent that his pleas were in vain, he sulked like a spoiled child.

As she crossed The Green to the Jesuit Mission, Diana flinched from meeting Father Courtenay who, as a fellow guest the previous evening, had been a witness of the unpleasant scenes enacted. She was thankful when the brief break for coffee passed without any reference to what must have impressed itself on his mind.

Most of the morning was devoted to copying copious notes regarding some fossil remains discovered in the hills by a mission helper. In an accompanying letter to an eminent geologist in London, Father Courtenay argued that the presence of these fossils at the spot where they were found disproved certain accepted theories regarded by geologists almost as axiomatic truths. Diana was unable to follow the argument because of ignorance of geology, but she became impressed by the writer's quiet certainty.

"How is it, Father," she asked when the task was done, "that you know so much about so many subjects?"

"I have been blessed with an enquiring mind. That is all. I am a servant of God who has found an unfailing and never-ending interest in trying to learn a little of God's methods in performing the wonders all about us. Learning of any kind, if approached properly, is an act of worship, for to learn a little of the universe is to realise that God is the only explanation of its secrets. There is not one science, you must understand, which at some stage does not bring the enquirer before a blank wall which represents the limit of human understanding. At that wall the honest enquirer pauses either to admit that there is no explanation, which is an absurdity, which in turn proves that he is not a scientist, or that the explanation lies rooted in a higher intelligence, which points the finger inevitably to God."

There was no flattery implicit in Diana's question, or Father Courtenay would have scorned to reply to it.

"Few people cultivate their powers of observation," he continued, a faint smile of amusement playing across his face. "We have the proof of that close at hand. None of the large party assembled at the Residency last evening, for example, observed anything remarkable in the fact that the clasp on a twenty-dollar string of pearls should be set with fine blue-white diamonds costing at least one hundred times that sum; nor that the Chinese expert arrived at his valuation by steadfastly regarding the ceiling; nor yet that the most surprised person in the room when he announced his valuation was the owner herself. I mention these things," he continued without giving Diana time to speak, "merely because I want to stress the need for developing the powers of observation as a preliminary to success in almost every field of scientific endeavour. And now," he added, looking at the clock and making for the door, "the duties of my office call me and you, doubtless, wish to continue your work."

XIV

THE ninth hole on the Fort Mallet golf course was a long one. The hard hitter was liable to be caught in a sand trap right across the fairway at about 180 yards from the tee. Diana, who had tried to carry it, had just failed. John Hudd took a No. 2 iron and, hitting the ball dead straight, watched it trickle to within five yards of the trap in a good lie.

That, Diana mused, was how John played the game of life. He was content to plod. She herself was by far the better golfer, but because she regarded the risks as part of the game, he often beat her.

These days Diana and John saw a great deal of each other. Something—Diana did not know what it was—seemed to

have cured him of his infatuation. Unflattering as it was, Diana was glad. In less than three months she would be gone from Fort Mallet for ever, but in the meanwhile John's friendship was her most precious possession. He had accepted, as the fact it was, that nothing more than friendship was possible between them, which had eased the strain of their relationship. He knew, now that it was too late, that if it had been in him to sweep Diana off her feet during her early days in Fort Mallet, he might have won her. But he knew, equally, that it was not in him and that pleading with a woman doomed a man to failure, especially with a woman like Diana.

Thus it was possible, against all the laws of probability, for these two to preserve, in defiance of the cynics, a very pleasant almost brother-and-sister friendship, unclouded by passion. In some subtle fashion, difficult to define, Diana was aware that John had taken her brother's place in her life. There had been no quarrel, but she and Jack were both sadly aware of a widening breach between them.

John's perceptions, though far from acute, told him plainly that Diana had been through some soul-searing experience and that somewhere at the root of the changes which had taken place in her was a man. He sensed that the door to Diana's heart had been slammed irrevocably in his face and that not to recognise this was folly which, in the long run, would hurt him and achieve nothing. So, in the spirit in which he used a No. 2 iron off the tee, he compromised for friendship. For Diana it was easier, of course, for she had never envisaged anything else.

Diana was managing to cultivate a neutral attitude towards life. She thought less of Jules, dwelled less on the might-have-beens and, orchids having been snatched from her grasp, seemingly for ever, was able none the less to see the beauty of daisies. If there were no longer great happiness at hand, equally there was no actively bitter unhappiness. Hers was now the almost pleasant numbness when a tooth ceases to ache and while ~~the~~ the memory of the ache is fresh.

John won the hole and the match. His faithful iron took him half-way to the green while Diana, once out of the trap, took a brassie and overshot the green.

Angus McCloskey joined them when they were having a drink afterwards. "She's on the mend," he replied to John's enquiry about Maggie Kennedy. "She has the constitution of a horse and it wouldn't surprise me if she were good as new before long."

"Do you allow visitors, Mac?" asked John.

"Yes, she'd be glad to see you. She complains about being lonely."

Diana watched John go off a few minutes later in the direction of the Residency. Maggie Kennedy's young men, she mused without bitterness, were faithful to her. There was nothing more to be gained by currying favour with her, for it was common knowledge around The Green that the Resident's days were numbered.

There was no longer any strain being with Angus McCloskey who, after his one outburst, had allowed their relationship to return to its old footing. Although she had never admitted it frankly to herself, Diana had known for a long while, with the instinctive knowledge of a woman, that McCloskey's feeling for her was not the casual friendliness it appeared to be. She knew, too, that Maggie Kennedy had detected this and resented it bitterly, simply because it was an aspect of his life from which she was excluded.

"I'm worried about you, Diana," McCloskey said when they were alone. "A doctor, I'm afraid, isn't much good to you. Is there—as a friend—anything I can do?"

"I'm worried about myself, Mac, but I don't believe there's anything you, or anyone else, can do. Thanks, and believe me that I wouldn't hesitate to ask you. Anyway, I'm not feeling as badly as I was a while back. In fact, I think half my trouble is that I'm not feeling—anything. I believe if you stuck one of your needles into me, it would be half an hour before I noticed it."

"That's a bad way to live, Diana. The greatest part of life

is feeling. It's better to feel hurt, angry, anything, than to feel nothing."

"I'm not quite sure of that, Mac. I wish I were. You once said to me that illusions were important. I know you were right there, and that's what's wrong with me now—at least partly. I haven't lived long enough, Mac," said Diana with a wail of protest in her voice, "to have lost my illusions. I'm not hard and cynical. . . . I'm just tired. Everything looks so futile. I'm not putting on an act, or anything like that . . . but I know, you see, that I ought to be making plans about lots of things, and I can't. To make plans one has to see a little into the future and I . . . well, I just can't see any future."

Angus McCloskey remained silent. As a doctor there was nothing he could say, while as a friend he dared not say the things which hovered upon his lips. His medical knowledge told him that he was in the presence of a healthy young woman, every one of whose vital organs was, by all the laws of probability, functioning normally. But something outside the realm of medical knowledge told him that these facts did not count alongside the more salient fact that in Diana the will to go on living was lacking. She had turned her back on life. He wished it lay within his power to restore her to full sentience, but he knew as the thought revolved in his mind, that the only sentiment he was personally able to arouse in her was pity and he wanted none of that.

"Jack is away this evening," said Diana as they were strolling round The Green, "otherwise I would invite you in to dinner. The shreds of my reputation don't matter, but I refuse to endanger yours."

They parted at the Residency gates, McCloskey to pay a final call on Maggie Kennedy and Diana to return home to a solitary evening.

More to please the cook than for any other reason, Diana ate a little of the food which had been prepared, and then took refuge in a novel. In the absence of a life of her own, novels gave her vicarious living. If the characters were vividly portrayed, she could share their anguish and their

fears, and on occasion laugh with them. Sometimes, indeed, she could shed tears with them, which she found remarkable, because outside the unreality of the novel, the fount of her tears had dried up.

On this evening, when she badly needed the solace of distraction, the novel was too flimsy to hold her. After persevering for an hour, she threw the book down in disgust feeling curiously ill at ease. There came over her the certainty that from somewhere out in the darkness, she was under observation.

Diana would have rung for a servant, but a little while previously she had heard them depart. There was a curfew law in operation at Fort Mallet and only Europeans were allowed within its limits after 9 p.m. except by special arrangement. There was a small criminal element at the Port and an intruder, prepared to take the risks involved, would find no great difficulty entering the Fort from the sea.

Still feeling no particular fear, but disliking the sensation of being under surveillance, Diana went into the darkness of her bedroom, where, from the top of the wardrobe, she took the revolver which Jack had insisted that she learn to use. Moving a chair across the room, she sat, the revolver on her knee, at a spot which commanded a clear view of the brilliantly lit lounge and the verandah beyond, through which any intruder must pass. Jack would be home in little more than an hour and Diana determined to wait thus for his return.

For more than twenty minutes she sat silent and watchful, and just when she was beginning to believe that she had been imagining things, there came from outside the unmistakable sound of a snapping twig. A minute later the wooden floor vibrated as it always did when the weight of a foot touched the wooden stairs. The intruder, whoever he was, had chosen the dimly-lit end of the verandah for his entry. This was just out of sight. Then, dimly and at an oblique angle through the mosquito screens, Diana saw the outlines of a figure.

"Stop, or I'll shoot!" she called loudly.

For reply there was a peal of derisive laughter. "Shoot, you silly bitch, and be damned to you. . . ." The rest of it was from the sewers of a disordered mind, hideous and unspeakably obscene. The voice was that of Adrian Hornby.

Now and for the first time, Diana was seriously alarmed. "I mean it, Adrian. I'll shoot if you force me to," she said, but even as the words passed her lips, she knew that she would not, could not shoot.

Diana's thought processes matched the speed of the fleeting seconds which were being ticked away by the busy little travelling clock beside her bed. She thought of Adrian Hornby as he had been, gay, good-humoured for the most part, a little reckless, but with a zest for life. The contrast between what he had been and what he was now become aroused in Diana all the pity of which she was capable. It would be so simple to pull the trigger of the revolver. It might even be a kindness to the demented man to do so. Life held very little for him now. She did not believe that he would ever climb back to normal living and thinking. Putting on the safety catch of the revolver, Diana threw it on to the bed. It had, she knew now, no power to solve her problem unless she were to usurp the function of God, who alone set the limits of a man's life.

Hornby had now moved into the bright light. His features were still fuzzy on the other side of the mosquito screen. His hand touched the knob of the door. The spring creaked loudly as the door opened.

"Shoot, why don't you? Shoot and be damned to you!" came Hornby's mocking voice.

From the other side of the hibiscus hedge, which divided the Maynard bungalow from that of McCloskey, there came the sound of the doctor coughing. If she could hear his cough, Diana argued, he would certainly hear her scream. A moment later her scream rent the still night air. It was heard as far away as the Residency, where Maggie Kennedy lay sleepless, believing it to be the cry of a nightbird.

Adrian Hornby was no longer stealthy in his movements. Three strides took him across the lounge to where Diana waited in the darkness, frozen with horror, but unable to bring herself to become his executioner. His whiskey-laden breath struck her with the force of a blow. It was the sick, foetid breath of a sick man. Picking up a light wooden chair, Diana thrust it in front of her and watched while it was taken from her and hurled across the room.

When Angus McCloskey heard the scream from the other side of the hedge, he was more than a little drunk, but the urgency of it brought him quickly to his senses. Simultaneously, from the direction of Jimmie's cage, there came a hideous pandemonium, a blend of crashing metal and bestial howls of rage. Even above this din, another scream could be heard plainly and this time McCloskey had no doubt whence it came. The quickest way into the garden of the Maynard bungalow was by a lane which ran at the back of all the bungalows on this side of The Green. The approach to it took McCloskey past Jimmie's cage where, with a suddenness matching its beginning, the howling and rattling had stopped. As he passed, the doctor turned the beam of an electric flashlight into the cage. Jimmie hated and feared a sudden light turned in his direction. McCloskey's heart missed a beat, for two vertical iron bars had been wrenched from the front of the cage. They were lying on the ground. The cage was empty.

McCloskey's whiskey-fuddled mind took in these facts, but it failed him when it came to interpreting them accurately. He jumped immediately to the conclusion that the escape of Jimmie and Diana's screams were related, as in point of fact they were, but not in the way he believed. In possession of his full faculties, McCloskey would have remembered that the screams preceded the frantic rattling of the iron bars, which in turn meant that whatever the cause of the screams, it was not Jimmie, who was in his cage when they were uttered. Panic-stricken at all the implications, he wasted precious seconds returning to his bungalow

to fetch a revolver, praying as he did so that he would be in time to avert a tragedy.

Diana had lost all sense of time. Seconds stretched themselves out interminably, so that imagination turned them into minutes. She was strong and physically fit, but she was no match for the demented man in whose arms she struggled, sickened by his breath as much as by his mumbled obscenities. Retreating inch by inch into her darkened bedroom, one free hand fell upon a pair of nail scissors which lay on the dressing-table. Snatching at them, she drove the point with all her strength into the fleshy part of Hornby's upper arm. He did not seem to feel it. Then suddenly, and for no apparent reason, Hornby released his grip and stumbled back into the lounge, uttering as he did so a shrill scream of terror which, coming from the throat of a full-grown man, was not only unexpected, but ghastly. Despite her own relief, Diana shivered at the sound. Crossing to the bed, where she had thrown the revolver, she seized it thankfully, released the safety catch and, remaining in the shadows, resolved now to use it if the need came again. From where she stood she became aware of another drama being enacted in the next room. A hanging oil lamp was swinging madly and by its light Hornby seemed to be in the grip of another man, a man whose movements were faster than any she had believed possible. A thing like a blood-stained wig was flung across the room, coming to rest in a brightly-lit spot upon the floor. A little pool of blood seeped from it. Diana's stomach seemed to turn over when she realised what it was: most of Hornby's beard lay on the floor. Almost simultaneously she realised the identity of the intruder, for she caught a brief glimpse of Jimmie's dark visage, his eyes reflecting red fire from the lamplight, his lips drawn back out of sight, baring white teeth which symbolised all the ferocity of the jungle where they belonged. Hornby was fighting like a wild beast too. There was a sickening thud as a heavy boot aimed for Jimmie's groin, struck him in the pit of the stomach. The ape gave a grunt, followed by the sound like that of air escaping from

a tyre. He fell back. Another savage kick went home. Almost the most frightening part of the battle was its savage silence. It was a battle to the death and both of the participants seemed to know it.

There was little opportunity afforded for self-analysis, but in the little there was Diana was horrified to realise that her instinctive as opposed to her reasoned sympathies (if sympathies can be reasoned) were with the ape. The sense of horror which swept over her at this realisation brought her to an understanding that Hornby, if a poor specimen of his race, was human. Jimmie—poor, lonely, unhappy Jimmie—had centred all his loyalty, all his affection upon one person, that person being herself. He had heard her cry in the night and, because he was what he was, a creature of uncomplicated loyalty and single-minded purpose, he had come to her rescue in the only way he understood. He had come, bringing with him the laws of the jungle, prepared to tear, rend and destroy for the sake of someone who had been kind to him. Jimmie now showed signs of recovering from the two brutal kicks he had received. He was unlimbering knotted muscles as he fought through a mist of pain. In a few moments, unless there were intervention from outside, Jimmie was going to kill Adrian Hornby. One of those long arms, which hung almost to the ground, was going to do dreadful things. Eyes blazing with fire and hatred, he was already crossing the room towards Hornby, whose face, mercifully, was averted from Diana. The two bodies would lock, and before they unlocked, Adrian Hornby would be dead.

Diana's forefinger curled round the trigger of the revolver. A gentle squeeze would resolve the problem. So easy. But was it easy? What would the recording angel have to say when it was entered in the book that Diana Maynard had killed the creature who had come to her rescue? Would it suffice to say: But he was only an ape? Was the life of an ape worth so much less than the life of a man who, despite all the advantages of his exalted status, had descended to the level of an ape? Was that justice?

And yet, after all, Adrian Hornby was a human being. She had danced with him, laughed with him, admitted him to equality. Some vague, unwritten code, understood least of all by those who lived by it, demanded obedience.

Precious split seconds passed as these thoughts ran through Diana's mind. The time for hesitation passed with them. Pointing the revolver at Jimmie's heart, she pulled the trigger in obedience to the unwritten law which said that, no matter how far a human being had slipped down the ladder towards the jungle whence he had escaped, his life outweighed in the scales the highest of the brute beasts who were still patiently, longingly climbing the lower rungs, gazing upwards in humble adoration at those who had achieved the God-given blessing of articulacy.

Diana saw the hurt, surprised look in Jimmie's eyes as the bullet struck him, and then she turned away. She heard Hornby shuffle across the lounge and out into the night, and a moment later there came the sound of his horse's hoofbeats receding in the distance. Briefly, she contemplated the luxury of fainting. For a few moments, indeed, consciousness hung by a slender thread. Then, it seemed, the small bungalow was full of people and voices and tramping feet, while there were shrill voices outside on The Green. Fort Mallet was being treated to another sensation of which, once again, Diana Maynard seemed to be the centre and focal point.

XV

JACK MAYNARD arrived home just in time to hear Diana give Hugh Kennedy a bald account of what had happened. He reported having met Hornby galloping madly in the direction of his own plantation. Listening to his sister, Jack found himself wishing, without quite knowing why, that she would give way to the feminine weakness of tears.

After such an ordeal, it would seem, she was entitled to be distraught, incoherent and—her brother hesitated even in his private thoughts—womanly. Instead, Diana replied to all questions in a cool, passionless voice. Her replies were completely factual. "Now, if you will excuse me," she said at length, looking down at her torn and blood-stained negligée, "I will go and change."

She went quickly into her own room and closed the door, leaving Hugh Kennedy, her brother and McCloskey in the living-room, while out on The Green the rest of the community waited in impatient curiosity. "You should be very proud of your sister, Maynard," said Kennedy. "She has wonderful courage."

"Thank you, sir!" Jack replied, wishing miserably that he could feel pride. He was unable to analyse just what he did feel beyond an uncomfortable awareness that somewhere Diana was lacking in sensibility. Vaguely there lurked at the back of his mind the thought that she was not entirely blameless, although if called upon to justify this, he knew he could not have done so. "I suppose, sir," he added, "I should go out and bring him in?"

"I'm afraid so, Maynard," replied Kennedy. "The man is evidently a dangerous lunatic."

"By the time you find him, Jack," interposed McCloskey, glancing at the bloodstained beard and a piece of Hornby's scalp, "he'll be so weak with loss of blood that he'll have to be carried in. In fact, if you delay too long, you won't find him alive. Take a stretcher party with you. . . ."

"Will you please make my excuses to Diana, sir," said Jack, preparing to leave. He was glad of the opportunity to avoid a private talk with his sister.

"Don't worry, Maynard," said the Resident kindly. "I'll take her back with me when I go. It isn't fair to leave her alone—after all this."

While Jack was making his brief preparations to leave, Diana returned to the room, clad in a beige linen frock and completely mistress of herself. "Be terribly careful, Jack," she urged him after the Resident had explained the necessity

for Hornby's arrest. "Adrian"—she paused—"isn't human any more. He's just a dangerous wild beast . . . poor Adrian."

Diana crossed the room to kiss Jack. For a brief moment their eyes met and the look which Diana saw in her brother's eyes appalled her. She knew, as plainly as though he had put it into words, that he blamed her for the events of the evening. She read a mixture of suspicion and hostility, and at once her own concern for his safety turned to something near anger. Brother and sister parted coldly, which was a pity, for Fate had already decreed that they should not meet again.

When Jack was gone, Diana refused uncompromisingly to sleep the rest of the night at the Residency. "It is kind of you, Mr Kennedy," she said firmly, "but it isn't fair to Mrs Kennedy. I shall be perfectly all right here—now."

Kennedy knew it would be useless to argue, so he satisfied his conscience by posting an armed Malay constable in the garden of the bungalow. He knew, too, that Diana was right and that, large as the Residency was, it was still not large enough for Maggie Kennedy and Diana Maynard.

An hour after dawn a runner arrived with a message from Jack Maynard, who reported having been greeted at Hornby's bungalow by a fusillade of rifle shots, none of which had taken effect. The servants had already fled. Hornby himself had taken to the jungle and Maynard requested the immediate despatch of six more Malay constables. These were at once sent out to him, together with the Resident's authority to use firearms if necessary.

The man-hunt was on.

There had been no sleep for Diana that night. Uppermost in her mind, even to the exclusion of the hideous drama which had been enacted, was the angry, suspicious, disillusioned look she had seen in her brother's eyes. She loved Jack dearly, but after that look, she knew, things would never be quite the same again between them and the pain of this seemed almost unendurable.

When the news from Jack had been relayed to her, Diana

felt unable to remain idle in the bungalow. She decided, therefore, to go to work as usual for Father Courtenay. Useful tasks would keep her mind off ugly realities, she believed. It was stiflingly hot, worse than she had ever known it at Fort Mallet.

Those who lived round The Green could hardly believe their eyes when they saw Diana set off as usual for the Jesuit Mission. Either the story of the previous evening must have been grossly exaggerated, or Diana, people concluded, was a remarkable young woman.

There was little work done in the Fort that day. All minds were focused on the drama of the man-hunt across there on the mainland, where leaden clouds were piling up, sombre and threatening. The older residents compared notes, deciding that they had never before known such sultry heat.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, an hour when it was usually deserted, the Fort Mallet Club was full. Little knots of men and women talked uneasily, trying to avoid expressing their thoughts by concentrating upon trivialities. They were embarrassed. One of their number was being hunted like a mad dog. They had played bridge and tennis with him. They had drunk with him. Some of them had danced with him. In a few hours, in all probability, he would be brought back into their midst, shackled and submissive. Perhaps only his dead body would return. Perhaps to poor young Maynard would fall the task of shooting in self-defence a man who had once been his friend.

The whole atmosphere of the Club was pregnant with unspoken thoughts, for it is a human attribute to apportion blame. Angus McCloskey came in for a share of this, for nobody had ever really approved of his experiments with Jimmie, the tale of whose part in the night's drama had lost nothing in the telling. Those with hindsight recalled having warned McCloskey that Jimmie was dangerous. The hum of conversation in the Club then seemed to die of sheer inanition, for if it continued there was a general awareness of the direction in which it would inevitably turn.

Then, from the intense, leaden silence which had settled over the Club and The Green, there came from the other side with uncanny clearness the swift rattle of Diana's typewriter. The sound proved to be the solvent of all reticence. People began to remember things which had been conveniently forgotten. They felt free to say things which they had never said before, chiefly because Hugh Kennedy had in some ill-understood fashion imposed a ban of silence and because it was now generally known that, as soon as Maggie Kennedy was well enough to travel, Hugh Kennedy would be relegated to the discard.

Mrs Pott remembered what Mrs Miller had told her in a fit of jealous anger, to the effect that Albert Miller had changed from his first meeting with Diana. Mrs Gosling quoted from a letter a garbled version of the Singapore scandal concerning Diana and Colin Peregrine, which led to open discussion of the fight between Peregrine and Hornby, several accounts of which had reached Fort Mallet. The tragedy of Hugh Kennedy's premature retirement stemmed, of course, from his chivalrous unwillingness to embarrass Diana by putting Hornby on trial for his initial assault upon John Hudd, while poor John Hudd had become a recluse because of his infatuation for her.

The Club lounge became, figuratively, a pool of malice into which the pebbles of accusation were more and more recklessly cast, with wider and ever wider ripples. Whenever, however briefly, a silence fell, there came from across The Green the sound of flying typewriter keys, telling eloquently of Diana's intense concentration upon the work she was doing. How could she, they asked themselves, be so callous, so coldly indifferent to the tragedy for which in their hearts they held her entirely responsible?

A *nice* girl, it was obvious, would be indulging in fatuous snivelling at home, instead of helping a *Jesuit* in his unholy work. "There's what a *Catholic* upbringing does for you!" snapped Mrs Gosling, bubbling with malice. "One can only guess at the things they dabble in.... A few hundred

years ago, before all the fire and zeal went out of religion, we would have known what to do with such people."

Henry Gosling took four or five quick steps across the lounge to where his wife was regaling a group of women with her views. His eyes blazed with anger. "Quieten that malicious tongue, woman!" he snapped. "I have asked you privately a score of times to remain silent unless you can speak charitably. Now I order you to remain silent . . . order you, do you understand? You are speaking of a fine man, who is my friend, and you are maligning an innocent young woman whose chief crime in your eyes is that she is graceful and beautiful. Look in your mirror, woman, and see if there you can make virtue from necessity!"

Henry Gosling's anger died as swiftly as it had risen. Something near hysterics swept through the Club when Mrs Gosling, sobbing and wide-eyed with horror, set off alone in the direction of home. "God forgive me!" said her husband in a voice which was almost a groan. "God forgive me! What have I done?"

Under the blanket of sultry heat, nerves and tempers were becoming frayed almost beyond endurance.

The typewriter keys across The Green still rattled at a furious speed. Nobody realised the blessed solace Diana was extracting from her self-imposed task in an effort to smother the ugly thoughts—far uglier than those of her critics—which threatened to overwhelm her.

XVI

By the middle of the afternoon a rising gale had swept away the sultry heat. A note from Father Courtenay to the Resident contained the warning that it would be far worse later in the day and that maximum wind force could be expected after sundown.

The Residency butler looked amazed when Maggie Kennedy insisted that afternoon tea be served in her favourite spot, overlooking The Green and the life which centred around it. Hugh Kennedy would have preferred to drink his tea inside, or on one of the sheltered verandahs, but he gave way to his wife's whim. McCloskey had warned him of the need to humour her. Nevertheless, Maggie's constant peering through the binoculars still had the power to irritate him. He was thankful at least that the noise of the wind made ordinary conversation difficult, for he had too much on his mind to find any release in small talk.

Time was short now. In a little while Maggie would be unable to indulge her taste for peering through glasses into the lives of other people. In a few weeks the unofficial intimation he had received would be implemented officially. They would pack up their belongings for shipment to England and retirement. One evening soon, and for the last time, their arrival at the Club would be the signal for the band to strike up the National Anthem. There would be an emotional dinner party, followed by laudatory speeches, to which he would be expected to reply. At some time during this function there would be the presentation of a silver rose-bowl, or something equally absurd, bearing an inscription to the effect that all classes of the community had subscribed to its purchase in token of the high esteem in which he was held. When the speeches were over, someone—Henry Gosling probably—would start the stupid and repetitious 'For he's a jolly good fellow!' A few sentimentalists would weep, while, in order to satisfy the conventions on such occasions, he and Maggie would be expected to leave, mopping their eyes. But there would not be one of those present who would know a tenth of the bitterness in his heart when the time came to turn over the Residency to his successor and to leave the trim perfection of The Green. Maggie would understand, but nobody else.

Maggie sat with her head slightly averted from her

husband. Life and movement were returning to one side of her face, but she was reluctant for him to see the grotesque effect when she tried to smile. It pleased her to continue the harmless fiction that the stroke had left her unchanged.

Kennedy walked to the cliff's edge to satisfy himself that the fishing fleet was all in. While he stood there a mountainous wave swept in from the open sea and across the beach road at the Port. He stood awe-stricken by the thunder of its passing. A faded Union Jack was being thrashed to tatters at the Residency flagmast. They would have to hoist a new one in the morning. It would symbolise the changes which were just over the horizon.

A little after five-thirty a few hardy souls, whom Maggie identified through her glasses, began their liver-shaking evening ride round The Green. Suddenly, while watching them battle against the still rising wind, Maggie's face hardened. She thrust her chin out belligerently. "Would you believe it, Hugh? That shameless Maynard girl is out riding. Has she no sense of decency at all?"

"I think you misjudge her, dear," replied Kennedy gently. "Anyway, try not to think of her, for it only upsets you."

"I don't understand you, Hugh, and now"—she spoke bitterly—"I suppose I never will. Are you so blind that you don't realise that your whole career has been wrecked because of that girl? Or are you like all the other men, besotted by her smiling good-looks and unable to see what a vile, scheming, immoral little trollop she is? For God's sake don't defend her in my hearing. . . . I don't think I can bear it."

Maggie fell silent as a Malay constable entered the garden, saluted, and handed an envelope to Kennedy. "It's from young Maynard, dear," he said when he had read it. "He's caught Hornby. Poor devil, he's in a bad way, it seems. But before they caught him he managed to put a bullet through young Maynard's shoulder."

Diana had seen the arrival of the constable and had

interpreted it rightly. Looking wind-blown and lovely, though quite expressionless, she rode into the Residency grounds. The constable took the reins while Kennedy beckoned to her.

As Diana approached the spot where the Kennedys were sitting, Maggie picked up her glasses once more and appeared engrossed in what she saw. She ignored Diana's polite "Good afternoon, Mrs Kennedy."

Diana seemed not to notice this, looking eagerly at Kennedy for news. "Your brother has got Hornby. They should be here in under two hours, but I'm sorry to tell you that before he was caught, Hornby managed to put a bullet through your brother's shoulder. Probably just a flesh wound, you know, so there isn't any need to worry."

"Thank you, Mr Kennedy. I'll ride along the coast road to meet him."

"I wouldn't do that, I think, my dear," said the Resident. "Heavy seas are sweeping over the road and it will be dark in another half-hour."

"I must risk that, Mr Kennedy. I ought to be with Jack. He may be hurt badly and in pain."

"I'm sorry, my dear," said he in tones which mixed severity and kindness, "but I'm afraid I shall have to be official and forbid you to go. The risks are too great."

As Kennedy spoke a gigantic wave swept in from the open sea, licking hungrily along the full side of the Fort facing the Port. The sight was so awe-inspiring that all three turned to watch its dramatic fury. When it had passed Maggie, whose hands were trembling violently, removed the glasses from her eyes and, with a curious deliberation of movement, put them away in their case, a task she usually left to the servants. Making an obvious effort to control herself, she turned to her husband. "How like you, Hugh!" she remarked, ignoring Diana. "On the only occasion when the girl shows the smallest humanity or concern for others, you forbid her to go. Let her go, I say. Let her go!"

The last words were uttered so ferociously that Kennedy,

turning to Diana, who had heard every syllable, tried to convey an apology by the expression on his face.

"I am sorry, Mr Kennedy," said Diana, smiling her understanding. "I hate to defy you, because you've always been so kind—so just to me. But my place is with Jack and I must go."

Without waiting for a reply, Diana went across swiftly to her horse, took the reins from the Malay constable, mounted, and rode out of the Residency gates.

While Kennedy was watching Diana cantering down the siding track in the direction of the Port, one of the flamboyant trees was uprooted by the gale, narrowly missing her. The horse swerved across the track in terror and then, taking the bit between his teeth, settled down to a mad gallop. Maggie, who also saw the incident, began to chuckle. Throwing her head back, she burst into uproarious laughter.

Another huge wave came thundering in. Kennedy watched it carry away a flimsy wooden structure on the beach road at the Port.

Maggie's laughter, meanwhile, grew wilder and louder, making itself heard even above the screaming of the gale and the thrashing of boughs overhead.

"Stop that laughing, Maggie!" cried Kennedy, putting his hands to his ears to shut out the hideous sound. "Stop it, I tell you. The poor girl is in mortal danger. That last wave may well have carried away the bridge."

Still laughing, Maggie picked up the case containing her glasses, hugging them lovingly to her chest. Her laughter died away. An evil expression crossed her face. Her lips moved as though she were about to speak and then pursed tightly, for she had changed her mind. Once again Kennedy waited as she seemed about to say something, but no words passed her lips.

In turn Maggie's face mirrored all the tumultuous emotions which were tearing her asunder. At one moment her face was a mask of cold hatred, made even more ugly by her disfigured mouth. Words appeared to be daftmed up

behind lips which twitched and bubbled. Then in a flash, changing with her thoughts, her face became soft and gentle. The love of a lifetime was in her eyes as she looked adoringly at Hugh Kennedy, while a little voice told her that she must remain silent so as to spare him the knowledge that she had seen the bridge carried away while Diana was still talking to him.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A few days after reading the final proofs of this book, I picked up a copy of a digest magazine and read one of Mr Somerset Maugham's famous Trio stories, "Mr Know-All." The situation and incident created by me between pp. 250 and 267 of this book bear so many resemblances to Mr Maugham's story that, without some word of explanation from me, I fear that many readers will be impelled to jump to an uncharitable conclusion.

Duty to readers, no less than courtesy to Mr Somerset Maugham, demand an affirmation—and I so affirm here—that until the moment recorded above I had never read the latter's famous story, or seen the film made from it. I hope that the truth of this will be self-evident, for only an imbecile would deliberately commit the literary crime of borrowing the ideas of a contemporary, particularly a contemporary whose fame is such as to make detection a certainty.

I do not know to what degree any work of imaginative fiction originates in its entirety in the mind of the author, without outside stimulus, but with this qualification, I sincerely believe myself to be the blushing victim of an unhappy coincidence.

R. S.